

FROM NAMES OF PLACES TO MAHSURI'S CURSE: EXPLORING THE ROLES OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

In a number of past studies, it is revealed that prominent myths and legends can stimulate tourism growth, enrich tourist experience and draw attention to a specific place. Although there are several works which investigated mythological stories in the context of tourism in Malaysia, limited studies have probed into the aspects of marketing and development. Exploring myths and legends in the context of Langkawi Island is significant as it is famously branded as "Island of Legends" and there is no other place in Malaysia with an abundant of traditional tales as Langkawi. In fact, a lot of places and sites on Langkawi Island including the capital town named Kuah, mountains, hot springs, lakes and caves have enticing local myths attached to them and some of the tales have been exploited for touristic purposes. As a result of the great value of this paper which examines how myths and legends have inspired tourism growth and promotional effort of Langkawi as a tourist destination. Methodological approaches such as content analysis, interview and site visit were used to fully understand the extent of which myths and legends have contributed to the growth and promotion of this destination. In terms of tourism growth, there are many attractions which have been constructed based on popular myths and legends can be found on Langkawi Island, including Mahsuri Tomb and Cultural Centre, Legends Park and Air Hangat Village. Although, tourism officials both at state and local levels claimed that they support the growth and promotion of Langkawi as a destination synonymous with myths and legends, the utilisation of these attributes has become less visible in the current marketing efforts particularly in the promotional materials published by the local authority. Overall, findings of this paper add to the existing knowledge in the field of tourism by revealing that renowned myths and legends can stimulate the development of primary attractions and be presented to tourists in the form of tangible assets as ways to simplify or affirm the tales.

Keywords: myth, legend, tourism promotion, tourism development, Langkawi Island

INTRODUCTION

One of the main attractions offered to tourists by the tourism industry in Malaysia is heritage tourism. In addition to physical and built heritage, Malaysia has a plethora of intangible resources also known as living heritage such as performing arts, traditional dances, rituals, customs and sacred tales. According to Esfehni & Albrecht (2016), intangible heritage resources can play many important roles in tourism particularly as attractions either primary or additional, support preservation of resources and as an approach to guide appropriate tourist behaviours. As tourist attractions, living heritage resources allow visitors to have better understanding of the destinations (McKercher and du Cros, 2002) and have their tourist experience of particular sites enriched (Perez-Aranda, Guerreiro and Mendes, 2015). Various living heritage including myths and legends have been used for commercial purposes including to attract tourists to selected destinations such as Romania and New Zealand (e.g. Candrea, Ispas, Untarus and Nechita, 2016; Carr, 2006). However, according to Hassan and Mohd Isa (2014), the use of myths and legends as tourism products is relatively new. As a nation located in the Oriental region, there are numerous mythological stories passed down from a generation to another generation in Malaysia. One place which is especially famous for myths and legends is Langkawi Island. Langkawi is a top island resort located off the coast of north-western Malaysia, in the Andaman Sea. Past scholars such as Ong (1994) and Mohd Yusof (2014) argued that Langkawi Island is intimately linked to myths and legends and it is unavoidable to talk about mythological and legendary tales when portraying this island. Besides, various natural and cultural sites on the island including the capital town named Kuah, mountains, lakes, hot springs, waterfalls and caves have appealing local myths attached to them.

Despite the contemporary tagline of Langkawi Island by national and local authorities as "Naturally Langkawi" and "the Jewel of Kedah", this island is still widely known as "Island of Legends" especially among locals. In fact, this island has been shrouded with mythological stories and mystical elements since a long time ago. These features are evident from an old "pantun" or Malay poetic form depicting the mysterious story of Tun Jana Khatib and the tale of "Garuda" (Wan Soloh, 1977; Augustin, 1977). Despite embracing modernity, the lifestyle of many Malaysians is still partly entrenched in mystical and traditional beliefs particularly in the context of wedding ceremonies and performing arts. Presently, the growing importance of these features is also reflected in tourism at the national level. This is revealed through the theme chosen for the yearly festival named "Citrawarna" also known as "Colours of Malaysia" held by the Tourism Malaysia in 2016. This festival adopted the theme "Myths and Folklore" last year. During this festival, states around Malaysia presented street performances based on themes associated with their local myths and folklore stories. Famous local myths and legends from each state such as Mount Ledang Princess, Cik Siti Wan Kembang, Lake Chini and Merong Mahawangsa were presented during this event. Prior to 2016, a similar theme called "Lagenda-Lagenda Malaysia" or "Malaysian Legends" was chosen as a theme for 2001 and among legendary tales staged for visitors including Huminodum from Sabah and Indera Kayangan from Perlis (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2016). It is demonstrated clearly that traditional tales have immense value to the tourism industry in Malaysia. Hence,

this paper aims to analyse how myths and legends have inspired tourism development and promotional efforts in Malaysia by focusing on Langkawi as this island has been known as the “Island of Legends”.

A study which explore myths and legends from the marketing and development aspects is regarded significant in the field of tourism. This is revealed through the current trend and efforts made by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in embracing local myths and legends as important tourism assets for this country. This is apparent as themes depicting local myths and folklore have been presented twice within the period of 15 years in the yearly festival, “Citrawarna”. Conceptually, through the analysis of a number of local and foreign destinations, previous researchers (e.g. Bidder, Kibat and Saien, 2014; Candrea et al., 2016; Dorgi, 2009) have proposed that aspects of myths and legends can be used to draw tourists either as main or additional attractions, provide understanding into local history and values and be adopted to attract Western tourists due to the popularity of dark tourism market. The analysis of myths and legends can be regarded as timely with the growth of dark tourism segment in which contemporary tourists could be even more interested in myths and legends associated with death, curse and mystical tales linked to various natural sites such as those found on Langkawi Island. From a geographical point of view, Langkawi Island can be considered as an exotic island, located relatively far away from some of the generating markets. Therefore, the utilisation of myths and legends can create a mystic image and offer something extraordinary for potentials tourists to visit. In addition to marketing, it is important to analyse the development of tourism products associated with myths and legends in Langkawi as promoting image relating to mythological and legendary tales is not sufficient to attract tourists motivated by these attributes. This effort should be supplemented by tourism products and attractions inspired by myths and legends. Overall, it is demonstrated in this section that the study relating to myths and legends are significant from the perspectives of industry, academic and contextual.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEVELOPMENT OF LANGKAWI ISLAND AND THE HISTORY OF MAHSURI

Past works have revealed that Langkawi has a long history. Both Western and local scholars have mentioned about this island in the literature published in the early days. One of the earliest literature which mentioned about Langkawi is the famous Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa (also known as the Kedah Annal). As this historical record contained myths and legends, Langkawi Island has been mentioned in the tale associated with the mythical bird, Garuda (Ong, 1994). This island is referred to as “Lungya-Kiao-yi” in the map of Admiral Cheng Ho during his voyage from China to Melaka in the 15th century (Mohd Yusof, 2014, p.425). For instance, Langkawi Island has been given many names since ancient times. This island is referred to as “Pepper Island” by a Frenchman named Augustin De Beaulieu who sailed to the East in 1621 as part of the effort to establish the “French East India Company”. Descriptions about agricultural activities and prices of pepper during that period were detailed out by him (Augustin, 1977). Early evidence of Langkawi as a tourist site is proven through the statement made by Din (1993) in which he claimed that the Dutch soldiers have used the island as a spot to rest and recover as early as 1642.

However, the growth of tourism in Langkawi Island formally and really has been boosted since the declaration of the island as a duty free in 1987. This declaration not only transformed its socio-economic level but also converted the island into a well-known tourist destination especially as a shopping spot. Prior to this, the economy of Langkawi Island was mostly dependent upon agriculture and fishing industries. In fact, it is claimed that 67% of the employment comes from these two sectors before 1987 (Marzuki, 2011). However, early accommodation facilities were already constructed on the island from 1948 to 1960s (Omar, Othman and Mohamed, 2013), reflecting that tourists have been coming to this island since then.

The importance of tourism to this island can be observed from the creation of an organisation named as the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA). It is a body established by the federal government to plan, design, implement and promote the development of Langkawi. This organisation was established in March 15, 1990 and placed under the Ministry of Finance (Ismail, 2015). Another important milestone in terms of tourism development of Langkawi can be seen through the establishment of the geopark. Langkawi was awarded a Global Geopark by Unesco on June 1, 2007. It is considered as a prestigious award as Langkawi was the first in the South-East Asia region and the 52nd globally to be recognized as Unesco Global Geopark (*The Star Online*, 3rd August 2015). Three areas on Langkawi Island which have been gazetted as Geopark are the Dayang Bunting Island, Gunung Mat Chincang and Kilim (Othman and Rosli, 2011; cited in Ismail, 2015).

Tourism is the key industry for the economic development of Langkawi Island. The contribution of this industry to the island can be seen through the revenue generated over the years (Mohd Salleh, Shukor, Othman, Samsudin and Mohd Idris, 2016). Langkawi earned RM5.6 billion from tourism in 2016 and Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) targeted RM9 billion from this industry by the year 2020 (*The Sun Daily*, August 3, 2017). In terms of tourism resources, Langkawi Island has been blessed with numerous natural and cultural resources suitable for tourism growth. It is well-known with exotic beaches, islands, mountains, hills, caves and cultural heritage attractions.

It is also important to discuss briefly the history of Mahsuri in the context of tourism development in Langkawi Island as the curse associated with her is the most cited tale and she was a well-known historical figure in Langkawi and Malaysia as well. Several local historicans particularly Mohd Yusof (2014) claimed that Mahsuri is a real historical figure but some parts of the supernatural events linked to the story have been claimed to be embellished as this tale has been passed from generation to generation orally. Besides, this is the nature of legendary tales, to contain stories associated with historical figures and events in which then have been incorporated with magical and supernatural aspects. According to Ong (1994), Mahsuri’s story occurred approximately two hundred years ago during the administration of Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah the Second who governed the state of Kedah from 1762 to 1800. Her parents named Pandak Maya and Amek Andak Alang came from Phuket and earned a living as farmers. Mohd Yusof (2012) states that physical evidence linked to Mahsuri also known as Princess Mahsuri (Puteri Mahsuri) has been affirmed after the Kedah Historical Society visited a village named Kemala in Phuket Thailand in 1988 and

discovered Mahsuri's descendant Wan Aishah Binti Wan Nawawi. This demonstrates that as a historian and the current president of the Kedah Historical Society, Mohd Yusof (2012) views Mahsuri as part of the history of Langkawi. Founded on past work carried out by the Kedah Historical Society research based on oral traditions with local experts and an expedition to Phuket, stories concerning Mahsuri have been divided into four parts. Events prior to the birth of Mahsuri, after Mahsuri was born, during her killing and after her death have been presented by Mohd Yusof (2014). These historical events include aspects of myths and legends especially connected to traditional beliefs. He further explains that evidence from a historical perspective can be seen in Langkawi and Phuket. For example, her grave, the place she was tortured and sites of destruction from the attack by the Siamese army are evident until today.

However, Western scholars such as Larsen (2007) argues the authenticity of the existence of Mahsuri and magical events concerning her. As mentioned by Larsen (2007), there is no hard evidence to prove her existence and murder. Meanwhile, Cheah (2012) is also quite skeptical with Mahsuri's story and her seven-generation curse which ended in the 1980s. She asserts that it could be a smart move to promote tourism industry in Langkawi Island which started around the same time when the curse supposedly expired. According to locals in Langkawi, the tale of Mahsuri can be linked to the first prime minister of Malaysia who stumbled into an unnamed grave while working as a district officer on the island. After he heard the sad story from local people about Mahsuri's fate, he asked the grave to be properly treated as a Muslim burial site (Ismail, 2000). A film about Mahsuri was later produced by Tunku Abdul Rahman which made Mahsuri's tale even more popular and her film was also a hit (Ong, 1994).

LANGKAWI, MYTHS, LEGENDS AND TOURISM

The review of the literature associated with the myths and legends related to Langkawi Island uncovered that there are several works which have discussed these traditional tales either directly or in relation to other resources. According to Mohd Yusof (2014), myths are perceived as real events which took place in the past by ancient societies which can be regarded as sacred. Langkawi myths and legends have been studied by several scholars such as Ali (1977), Wan Soloh (1977), Ismail (2000), Ismail (2008) and Mohd Yusof (2014). However, some of these authors only compiled these traditional stories. For example, in his book entitled "The Legends of Langkawi", Ismail (2000) compiled and detailed out narratives of eleven myths and legends. In addition to the famous tales such as Mahsuri and the fight between Mat Raya and Mat Chincang, this book also includes stories like the Mysterious Grave, Cave of Sirens, Cave of the White Hill, Cave of Stories, Gedembai, the White Crocodile, The Cape of the Screen and The Giant Bird (Garuda). However, the effort to compile and present these traditional tales in printed version is important to make sure that these intangible resources are not lost as many of Malaysian myths and legends only exist in the form of oral history.

Myths and legends can play several roles in tourism. Firstly, myths and legends are significant resources which can be converted into tourism attractions (Perez-Aranda et al., 2015). Hassan and Mohd Isa (2014) argue that myths and legends can become cultural tourism products. The presence of indigenous tales associated with the Lanoh community such as the souls of their ancestors, the magical of Ketapang tree, fairies and the relationship between their community and Malays can increase the attractiveness of Lenggong Valley as a Unesco World Heritage site. Presently, these indigenous tales can supplement the main attractions and further development needs to be done before transforming these intangible resources as main attractions (Hassan and Isa, 2014). These two studies demonstrate that myths and legends can be promoted for tourism purposes either as cultural tourism products or as additional attractions to complement other tourist resources.

Furthermore, the incorporation of traditional and sacred tales can serve several functions in tourism and promotional efforts. According to Candrea et al. (2016) the attachment of tourist sites and destinations with the myths of places can result in the increase of tourist visits and be utilised in marketing strategies. It is argued that local myths and legends can be exploited as a promotional tool in order to differentiate destinations and sites with competitors in the tourism industry (Perez-Aranda et al., 2015). In the analysis of a beach destination called Algrave in Portugal, they argued that the historical and cultural resources including myths and legends can be used to enrich visitors' personal experience and enhance the destination image. For Romania, the connection of this country to the distinctive and the well-known Dracula's myth can offer a competitive edge in marketing this destination to the international markets especially Western Europe and United States. In the analysis of a city named Bam in Iran, it is reflected in the work carried out by Amirjamshidi, Fodde, Ayala and Mokhtari (2012) that legends are among attributes which can play a role in accentuating the authenticity of heritage buildings. In fact, these scholars suggested that oral history and legends should be given considerations in the conservation of heritage buildings. Overall, it is revealed by these works that the inclusion of myths and legends in tourism can increase tourist visits, deepen tourist experience, provide authenticity, heighten the competitiveness and project a unique image of a destination.

METHODS

Methodological approaches such as content analysis, interview and site visit were adopted to fully understand the extent in which myths and legends have contributed to the growth and promotion of Langkawi Island over the years. Content analysis is considered appropriate in the analysis of the websites of attractions and promotional materials associated with the myths and legends in Langkawi. The increasing application of content analysis is evident today as more contents including government websites and online promotional materials have been published and available online via Internet (Hopkins and King, 2010). It is a means to uncover particular features represented in the content of messages either in the forms of textual, pictorial, themes, social displays or preferences (Williams, 2007). Therefore, in this paper, websites of tourist attractions and promotional materials published by both public and private sectors were analysed using the content analysis method. Websites and online brochures published by Tourism Malaysia and LADA were examined. Places and sites offering and promoting myths and legends as attractions or linked to these tales either by public sectors or private companies or individuals were also reviewed. However, the

type of content analysis mostly adopted in this paper was the qualitative approach. The unit of analysis used in the analysis of this paper is fairly broad which includes textual description and images connected to attractions and development related to myths and legends either directly or symbolically.

To gain further understanding of the extent in which myths and legends have stimulated the tourism growth and promotion of Langkawi Island, the primary assessment using a content analysis technique was complemented with an interview method. Oltmann (2016) states that qualitative interview has been perceived as one of the primary tools to gather data for a long time. It is claimed that the qualitative research methods are suitable to be adopted to have detailed and comprehensive understanding of particular subjects (Creswell, 2007). In general, interview can expand the understanding of a particular issue as this approach is more natural and less rigid (Alshenqeeti, 2014). One advantage of using interview as a research method is that interviewees can express their views directly (Berg, 2007). Therefore, senior officials at the state level and local organisations were interviewed to know their efforts and support for tourism growth based on myths and legends. Officers from Langkawi Tourism Authority (LADA) and Tourism Malaysia were interviewed in the assessment conducted in this paper. Site visits to tourism attractions associated with myths and legends in Langkawi were also carried out to explore how myths and legends have been presented to visitors. Interviews and site visits were carried out from September 2016 to Feb 2017.

Several steps were carried out in the analysis of this paper, firstly, relevant materials available and published online especially those by national, state and local organisations were analysed. Then places and sites which developed and promoted tourism attractions based on myths and legends were reviewed. After a content analysis on these materials was completed, interviews with relevant organisations were carried out followed by site visits to places and attractions well-known with myths and legends in Langkawi. Sites visited include Legends Park, Mahsuri Tomb and Cultural Centre (also known as Kota Mahsuri), Field of Burnt Rice, Air Hangat Village and Eagle Square (Dataran Helang).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings of this paper revealed that myths and legends play an important part in the tourism growth and development of Langkawi Island particularly over the past three decades. In terms of tourism growth, the analysis shows that two main attractions were developed based on mythological stories frequently recounted on the island. These sites are Legend Park (Taman Legenda) and Mahsuri Tomb and Cultural Centre (also known as Kota Mahsuri). Additionally, the construction of sites such as Air Hangat Village (Telaga Air Hangat) and the Field of Burnt Rice (Beras Terbakar) have been inspired by traditional mythological tales. From the perspective of tourism promotion, several myths and legends including Mahsuri's curse, legendary brawl involving Mat Chincang and Mat Raya, Dayang Bunting Island, Telaga Tujuh, Beras Terbakar, Gua Cerita and Gua Langsuir are mentioned in the promotional materials including websites and online brochures.

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS BASED ON LANGKAWI MYTHS AND LEGENDS

One of the attractions with strong connection to myths and folklore is a park named "Legend Park" or "Legenda Langkawi dalam Taman". Clearly, the construction of this park was strongly inspired by various mythological tales found on the island. This is an attraction solely focusing in exhibiting traditional tales of Langkawi. This park was opened to the public in 1996 with the cost of MYR37 million and it is opened daily. It is located not far from Eagle Square in the capital town of Kuah and under the management of LADA. Local myths and legends are presented to visitors using the concept of a scenic park surrounded with local plants. It contains 17 sculptures showcasing well-known myths and folklore tales. Among sculptures and written stories presented to visitors including the feud between Mat Chincang and Mat Raya, Pulau Dayang Bunting (Pregnant Maiden Island), Telaga Tujuh (Seven Wells), Telani dan Telanai (a story associated with a white crocodile), Pulau Cincin, Mahsuri's curse, Garuda and Jentayu and many more.

The construction of this park demonstrates the effort to celebrate mythological stories of Langkawi. This aspect is apparent as it is depicted on one of the signboards made from stone at the Legend Park saying key role of this park is to make Langkawi mythological and legendary tales come alive. As part of this effort, sculptures to exhibit the main stories of the myths and legends and key individuals or characters were built and presented to visitors. The representation of these traditional tales in the form of sculptures reveals how intangible cultural heritage has been staged in the form of tangible heritage. Summaries of the tales are available on the signboards or interpretation boards to provide brief descriptions of the sculptures. One advantage of using sculptures to present mythological and folklore tales is that they can enhance understanding and offer a simplified version of these stories to visitors. The technique of interpretation using visual image can be more effective to young visitors as this attraction can be an educational site to study about Langkawi Island.

The serious effort to demonstrate Langkawi's myths and legends as primary tourist sites on the island can be seen through the establishment of a costly attraction which exclusively highlights the traditional tales found of the island. The concept of showcasing myths and legends using the concept of a park reveals a close relationship between myths and natural environment. The artificial lakes located inside this park is useful in depicting tales concerning formation of several islands based on local legends. Unfortunately, some of the sculptures and interpretation boards are not in good condition during the site visit to this park. Descriptions of the tales featured on the boards are not readable to visitors. It is quite sad to see one of the main attractions in Langkawi Island which required huge investment have not been maintained properly. Probably more suitable materials should be used as sign or interpretation boards in the park. If visitors are not able to read the mythological and legendary tales, it can defeat the purpose of their visits to Legends Park as the original purpose of its creation is for the enhancement of local tales and values of Langkawi.

It is also worth mentioning of a statue built not far from the park, "Dataran Helang" or "The Eagle Square", located in the capital town, Kuah, next to the jetty. The main attraction of this square is a big statue of a bird commonly known as "helang" or "eagle".

It is regarded as one of the primary attractions in the island as it marks the origin of the name Langkawi Island. As this place myth is important to the people of Langkawi, this square with a statue of a giant bird was constructed to symbolize the name of this island.

Another tourism site built based on local legend is a place named Mahsuri Tomb and Cultural Centre also known as “Kota Mahsuri”. This place is situated at Kampung Mawat, Ulu Melaka. Originally, this site was constructed to remember the famous historical figure, a woman named “Mahsuri”. The legend associated with Mahsuri is the most renowned in the island of Langkawi and Malaysia. It is claimed that Kota Mahsuri is a place where Mahsuri was buried when she was killed at a place called Padang Mat Sirat around 200 years ago. On the whole, this place appears well-maintained and was presented attractively to visitors. Starting from a humble graveyard, this place was developed and expanded to include a cultural centre, a museum, a theatre, a music room, a traditional house, a gift shop and a well. Not only visitors are able to learn about the life of Mahsuri and the lifestyle of the Malays in Northern region but information on Mahsuri’s family line including her family and her seventh-generation descendant represented by Wan Aishah is also provided.

From one side, it is good to develop such a diverse cultural centre as a tourism attraction celebrating the most famous historical figure in Langkawi. The construction of this attraction demonstrates how the life and objects such as a well, a dagger and photographs associated with a well-known and historical individual can transform into a tourist attraction. This cultural centre which also houses her tomb can make visitors appreciate the life of Mahsuri even further. The technique of interpretation used in presenting the Mahsuri legend and her life is fairly interesting as reconstruction method is adopted in addition to textual description and visual images. In fact, three days a week, a theater performance of Mahsuri life is showcased to visitors. However, it appears that the legend associated with Mahsuri has been commercialised to attract tourists with the inclusion of a traditional house and a music room. In fact, entertainment elements are not suitable to be staged near a Muslim burial site. This phenomenon is not common in Malaysia especially among Muslims as graveyards are normally considered sacred and visitors are expected to dress decently and behave appropriately when visiting them. Although the authenticity of her tomb has been questioned by some such as Larsen (2007) and Cheah (2012), the reenactment of Mahsuri life through the cultural centre and the representation of her tomb and well as objects of tourist attractions can act as an evidence to support her presence in the past. In fact, Mohd Yusof (2014) regarded these objects as tangible proofs of her existence in the past.

There are a few other attractions and sites on Langkawi which feature myths and legends. One of these sites is Air Hangat Village. This place is a cultural complex and the main attraction is the tiered hot water spring wells. This site is quite modern and equipped with various facilities linked to hot spring water including jacuzzies, small ponds and flowing water in small drains. There are also flowing drains of hot water where visitors can soak their feet at the site. One of the drains is equipped with a wooden table and chair along the flow of hot water to allow visitors to sit comfortably and soak their feet. Air Hangat Village also contains landscaped gardens, cultural shows, restaurant, and souvenir stalls. Despite the thermal springs representing the main assets to attract tourists, legends associated with this site are also featured at the location. A mural is presented as part of Air Hangat Village. An interesting legend depicting a brawl between giants named Mat Chincang and Mat Raya during the wedding of their children was manifested at the site. The fight between these two giants were so fierce that pots, pans and jugs were thrown. As a result of the brawl, it is claimed that a jug of boiling water fell into this place, making thermal springs to appear at the site. Therefore, this place was named as “Air Hangat” which can be translated as hot water. Although the primary attraction here is the hot water, legend associated with the name of this site is clearly showcased at the wall with a mural. The legend depicted on the wall is relatively a long tale. Part of the tale states that “The spot on which pots of gravy had splashed became known as Kuah (gravy). And where the jugs of boiling water landed, hot spring spouted. Villagers called it Ayer Hangat (pronounces as *ai-yer* which means water, *hangat* which means hot). Yet another area was called *Kisap* (seep), because all the water seeped into the earth here”. This evidence shows that the origin of the name of this site has been incorporated into the attraction at Air Hangat Village.

Another place with a strong connection to myths is known as “Beras Terbakar” which can be translated as the Field of Burnt Rice. Historically, this was the site where local people in Langkawi burnt their crops during the fierce battle with the Thai army in the past. The myth associated with this site claims that the smell of burnt rice by past ancestors can still be detected until today. Although this site is not developed for tourism purposes, it has a historical importance to Langkawi. According to locals, the villagers were not willing to surrender their rice fields to the Siamese soldiers. This tactic was used to starve the Thai soldiers. As a result, many local people died due to starvation. Today, this site is located on a private land which belongs to an individual named Ku Halim bin Ku Hassan. Although visitors are not able to see the hole used to burn the rice, there is a signage indicating the spot of the hole at the site. Besides, visitors can see the sample of burnt rice in a case made from glass.

During the site visit to Beras Terbakar area, this spot which is well-known for the myths and historical significance to Langkawi needs further development. At least, basic facilities for visitors need to be built. Perhaps, tourism officials in Langkawi can work together with the owner of this land in developing it for tourism. In fact, the involvement of the owner and his family in the development and as a custodian of this site will make it more appealing and authentic to visitors. Based on the value of this myth to Langkawi Island, this site has an enormous potential to attract visitors. The value ingrained in the myth of burnt rice demonstrates the importance of paddy or rice grains to the Malays living in Langkawi Island and Kedah in general. Paddy not only represents the main staple for locals but also an emotional and sentimental attachment to the Malays. Additionally, this myth is connected to Mahsuri’s legend as the invasion of Langkawi by the Siamese and starvation of the local people which reflected the curse uttered by the wronged maiden. In the future, if the site of Beras Terbakar is upgraded it can be promoted together with Kota Mahsuri especially as part of the heritage trails based on mythological and legendary themes of Langkawi Island.

Similar to other destinations in the world such as Romania and New Zealand as shown in studies by Candrea et al. (2016) and Carr (2006), public authorities in-charge of Langkawi Island and private bodies have taken advantage of the popular myths and legends and transformed them into tourism attractions and utilised to gain profits. Therefore, the building of a costly attraction and specific sites associated with Langkawi's myths and legends demonstrates that tourism and development authorities believed that these cultural attributes can lure tourists to visit the island as manifested by Candrea et al. (2016) that the relation of tourist sites with renowned place myths can boost tourist arrivals.

Besides, the costly price of constructing the Legend Park by the island's local authority exhibits a strong commitment to celebrate myths and legends found on the island. The creation of an attraction named "Kota Mahsuri" from a well-known legendary tale, was an innovative idea not only to showcase the past life of Mahsuri but also the Malay cultural values and lifestyle from northern region to tourists. Thus, the addition of cultural centre can attract a broader visitor market and provide deeper understanding of local culture and values to visitors. This demonstrates the point put forward by McKercher and du Cros (2002) and Perez-Aranda et al. (2015) which argue that the offering of intangible heritage let tourists provide deeper knowledge of the places visited.

TOURISM PROMOTION OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

In the context of tourism promotion of Langkawi Island, it is found that the recent promotional materials published by the local and national authorities did not use myths and legends as their latest taglines. Even though the latest tagline used by Tourism Malaysia to promote Langkawi currently is "Langkawi the Jewel of Kedah", attractions and sites with mythological and legendary stories are still featured in this brochure. In introducing Langkawi as a tourist destination, it is stated that this place is filled with interesting myths and legends which "feature ogres and gigantic birds and fairy princesses, battles and romance" (Langkawi the Jewel of Kedah Brochure, 2015). Places and attractions frequently linked to myths, legends and folktales such as the Eagle Square, Taman Legenda, the Lake of Pregnant Maiden, Seven Wells, Gua Cherita, Air Hangat Village and Kota Mahsuri are included in the brochure. Not only that, traditional and sacred tales associated with these places are incorporated briefly into the descriptions. In addition to the brief tales, mystical and mysterious elements are also stated in the descriptions of the island's natural sites. Overall, the assessment of the brochure published by Tourism Malaysia demonstrates that myths and legends are still featured prominently despite the adoption of the new tagline.

The analysis of the latest promotional brochure of Langkawi Island does not include mythological and legendary tales associated with famous places and sites on Langkawi including Mahsuri's curse and the brawl between Mat Chincang and Mat Raya. However, attractions associated with legends and folklore such as Taman Legenda and Eagle Square are included in the brochure. Folktales depicting the origins of the name of Langkawi Island, are incorporated into the brochure published by LADA. Two versions of the tales are presented in the brochure. One version of the tales is the common story found in many other promotional materials which claims that the word 'Lang' comes from the Malay term 'helang' or eagle. On the other hand, 'kawi' refers to the colour of many eagles which is "reddish-brown". A different explanation claims that 'langka' means 'beauty' and 'wi' implies "innumerable". Therefore, the combination of "langka" and "wi" denote a very beautiful place. In general, the representation of the current tagline 'Naturally Langkawi' has been linked to the popularity of this island with legendary tales. The phrase "Naturally Legendary" is mentioned in the current brochure. The island is further described as "Langkawi, the 'Isle of Legends'. Naturally legendary for its beauty, warmth and the charm of its people". The analysis of this promotional brochure reveals that the publisher de-emphasises attributes and attractions linked to myths and legends. Although the focus of "Naturally Langkawi" is the uniqueness of natural resources, other attractions including cable car, entertainment cinema, duty free shopping, sailing and marinas and health and wellness are promoted as well. This is probably because the inclusion of myths and legends can overshadow the current projection of Langkawi as a destination with beautiful natural resources.

In investigating the support for myths and legends by tourism authorities at the state and local levels. Officers from both bodies stated that these organisations fully support tourism development and promotional activities associated with myths and legends. At the state level, Tourism Malaysia officers admitted that myths and legends are very important to the tourism development of Langkawi. In fact, the effort to embrace Malaysian mythological tales has been expanded by the Tourism Malaysia at the state level by organising a workshop named "Ceritera Mitos dan Legenda Langkawi" or "Stories of Langkawi Myths and Legends" in September last year in Langkawi Island. Various stakeholders and experts in the field including academicians, historians, local communities and tourism practitioners were invited to this workshop. The primary aim of this workshop was to collect and publish local tales found in the island, particularly the least familiar stories. Participants of this workshop were also brought to several sites commonly linked to myths and legends to provide clearer pictures of these places. Based on the interviews, it appeared that the senior state officials strongly value myths and legends and are prepared to support the growth of Langkawi Island as the Island of Legends. Their views are also reflected through the analysis of the promotional materials published by this organisation over the years including the recent brochure.

However, according to local authorities, natural resources are particularly important to the tourism development of Langkawi since the launch of the Langkawi Blueprint. The new tagline is in line with the main aim of the Langkawi Blueprint to make Langkawi Island as one of the top ten island destinations and a key ecotourism destination in the world. The current objective of LADA is to focus on the uniqueness of natural resources and environmental protection. Since Langkawi received the award as Unesco Global Geopark in 2007, the authority has made more initiatives in environmental protection to maintain this status. Rebranding Langkawi as a "Unesco Global Geopark" and "Naturally Langkawi" is a part of the efforts to highlight the uniqueness of its natural assets in line with the target markets. According to these officials, myths and legends have been and will always be important to this island and their residents. These traditional tales are still parts of the geopark and the natural resources of this island.

Although, the focus of tourism in Langkawi Island currently is to present it as a top island destination and to highlight environment protection, the representation of myths and legends should not be reduced or omitted from its marketing and promotional efforts. It is because for ages this island has been known for its mythological and legendary tales. Although, some of the reasons for the modifications of the taglines and marketing strategies are based on commercialization, funding and maintaining the status of Langkawi as a Unesco Global Geopark, the incorporation of mythological and legendary resources can offer several advantages to tourist destinations. As mentioned by previous scholars (e.g. Perez-Aranda et al., 2015; Amirjamshidi et al., 2012 and Candrea et al., 2016), the inclusion of myths and legends in tourism marketing and promotion can offer several benefits such as enhancing visitors experience and authenticity, boosting the competitiveness and projecting a distinctive projection of sites and destinations. Therefore, as a destination which is well-known for these features, tourism authorities should embrace this uniqueness and integrate them with their fresh marketing approaches. At least two of the most famous legends, Mahsuri's curse and the brawl between Mat Chincang and Mat Raya which depicted the origins of the names of places on Langkawi Island should be highlighted as these traditional and sacred tales are part and parcel of local history and identity.

CONCLUSION

This paper has assessed one of the under-researched areas in the context of tourism in Langkawi Island, how myths and legends have inspired tourism growth and promotion of Langkawi as a tourist destination. The analysis in this paper has been carried out using methodological approaches such as content analysis, indepth interview and observation of the sites. Findings of this paper filled in the gap of the study by contributing knowledge on how myths and legends have affected tourism growth and promotion of Langkawi. Main findings of this paper revealed that mythological and legendary stories are important parts of tourism growth and promotion of island. To demonstrate this scenario from the point of view of development, several well-known myths and legends narrated on the island have stimulated the construction of a number of main tourist attractions particularly Legends Park (Taman Legenda), Mahsuri Tomb and Cultural Centre (Kota Mahsuri), Air Hangat Hangat Village and the Field of Burnt Rice. The presentation of several mythological and legendary stories from intangible heritage into tangible heritage and showcasing some of tangible objects of the tales have been adopted by tourism authorities to strengthen or simplify some of the myths and legends. However, based on the content analysis of websites and brochures, it is identified that the association of this island with the traditional tales is becoming less apparent. The current taglines of this island have shifted to Langkawi as part of the state of Kedah and to promote the natural environment. Tourism officials from both bodies affirmed that myths and legends have played important roles in the island tourism growth since the early days until today. However, the utilisation of these traditional tales has become less noticeable in the current marketing and promotional efforts especially in the promotional materials published by the local authorities. Overall, findings of this paper extend the knowledge to what extent myths and legends have encouraged tourism from the perspectives of development and promotion of Langkawi as a tourist destination thus far.

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