

Exploring the Interactive Model of Malaysian Museums in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Similar to other countries in the whole world, Malaysia is also affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This deadly virus spreads like wildfire and at present, above one hundred million people are infected. The number of visitors has somehow been significantly influenced by this. Although some of the policies and procedures implemented by the government have been followed and implemented by the Penang House of Music activities, the number of attendees to this interactive museum reveals a decreasing trend compared to the previous years, before the pandemic. Undoubtedly, all countries are affected. Therefore, the present COVID-19 epidemic affecting the world community is without a doubt bringing a potentially devastating consequence on the museum industry. The impacts were also acknowledged by Penang House of Music in ways in which they could not predict the outcome in the current situation, especially on financial woes. Museum institutions around the world have demonstrated versatility and innovation in introducing numerous approaches to find the solution in the struggling situation they are currently facing. The researcher hopes that this interactive museum can become a role model and great example for other museums, especially in Malaysia when it comes to displaying exhibitions that are very appealing and can surely attract a significantly larger number of visitors.

KEYWORDS

Penang; Interactive museum; Models; Behavioral pattern.

1. Introduction

Penang House of Music has collected, housed, and is exhibiting a wide range of cultural practices that exist in Malaysia, particularly in the state of Penang and the music of local and worldwide communities that are rarely seen presently. This musical and cultural museum is one of the most interactive and exceptional museums in Penang with a fascinating array of the exhibition. This highlights that Penang House of Music has an astonishing interactive range of exhibits to display to its audience members and with no doubt, even the number of tourists who visit this museum is overwhelming.

2. Literature Review

Interactive museum and models of Penang House of Music



Figure 1. The main entrance of Penang House of Music

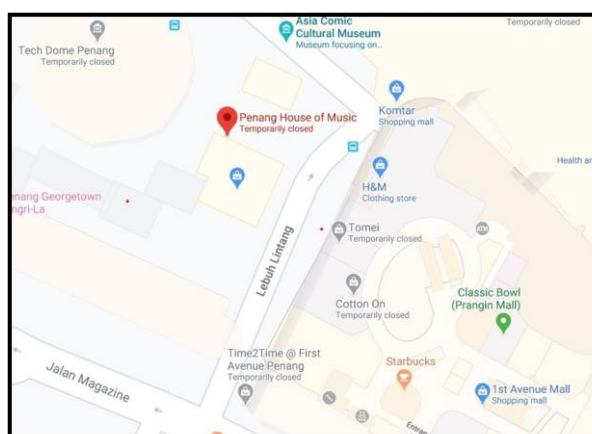


Figure 2. The location of Penang House of Music, Georgetown

Henceforth, each interactive museum has a fascinating approach and concept on its own. It demonstrates that one of the tourist attractions that people from around the world alike should not neglect is the interactive museums in Penang. Intriguingly, Penang currently has more than 41 museums which include various themes and ownerships to visit by the year 2021, and it has become one of the world-famous tourism attractions. This indicates that in the state of Penang, the government has utilized the advancement of museums to make this institution one of the cultural tourist attractions that can have a huge impact on the economy and create more job opportunities.

Saidon H. J. (2007) claimed that the historical background of interactive museums in Penang began with the establishment of a majestic museum namely the Museum & Gallery of Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF). Besides, in 2016, the Penang House of Music has been established and can be listed as one of Penang's highest-rated and most sophisticated interactive museums (Ferrarese, M. 2018). The most recently established interactive museum in the state of Penang was the Wizard Museum of Magic & Illusions which was opened approximately two years ago, on the 21st April 2019.

Museum Interactive Experiences

Theoretical perspectives on the experience of interactive museums have been conducted by various scholars around the nations in this modern world. This is because interactive museum experiences can increase comprehension, accomplish learning outcomes and boost information understandings (Falk, 2018). These

aspects can be identified with increasingly sophisticated developments by involving the latest technologies in interactive museum exhibits to provide effective visitors' interactions. The new hitechnological instruments and tools can be used by contemporary interactive museums to foster an environment of attractions not just through the pieces of art, but also through the objects used in exhibiting them (Murphy, A., 2018). The highly sophisticated technologies that exist nowadays could synchronize with the digital era and knowledge development among the younger generations at present.

Museums are now facing a paradigm change. Sophisticated technologies nowadays are taking place in helping to develop museums' environment and in welcoming more visitors and returners to the museums. Visitors to the museums are not only among the older generations. What museums nowadays have to do is to put more effort in attracting the younger generations so that they will pay more interest towards museums and that museums could kill their curiosities, apart from offering new knowledge for them. In a way, the transfer of knowledge always happens in museums and each time a visitor explores a museum.

Accordingly, to implement the eye-catching displays, interactive museums need to be in a state of consciousness regarding the latest technological innovations to apply it at the exhibitions. Sharp H (2019) stated that the experience of the state of "museum tourist industry" is rather exhilarating with implemented various interesting exhibitions. Apart from that, this kind of exhibition can create awareness and the perception of the state of museum tourism is very entertaining and visually striking with visitors. Contributing to the whole, fascinating exhibitions must be produced and the most suitable alternatives to attract repeat visitors or returners and newcomers are providing diverse attention-grabbing experiences.

Museum Interactive Exhibitions

In an interactive museum, presenting exhibits involves taking a multidisciplinary method. The awareness of touching items in a museum may create an impression as though the precise notion goes against everything that has been taught to the visitors in Western museums (Trollinger, S.,2016). This is because some western museums do not allow visitors to have physical contact with their items, as one of the primary reasons is to prevent any possible harm that can contribute to damaging collections. A similar scenario happens in Malaysia, which not all museums including leading and common museums allow their visitors to touch the collections on display. This creates minimal engagement between the collections and the visitors. Thus, the information bound to be shared with the visitors becomes comprehensively less effective.

Interactive museums have started to be regarded as one of the must-visit places for both local and international tourists in many parts of the globe. Items and exhibited artifacts are always functioning as a nucleus and backbone of the interactive museums (Pogrebin, R., 2019). When exhibiting the collections, the interactive museums could have ineffective space constraints. Collections exhibited by interactive museums will pose a dangerous risk such as collection damage if they are exposed to various factors such as air and vandalism. This illustrates the value of an interactive museum that maintains the collections and exhibits that remain durable and take the burden of damage. Museums in Malaysia have their challenges due to their tropical climate throughout the year and the difficulties of maintaining the collections at their premier quality for several years unless the museums provide proper storage and other equipment and tools to avoid damage.

3. Methodology

This study investigates visitors' behavioral patterns and models of interactive museums in Penang, specifically the Penang House of Music. The methodology employed by the researchers is divided into two fundamental categories which are internal (primary) and external (secondary) approach that involved different types of methods and resources. In determining the outcome of this study and fulfilling the purpose of the objectives,

the evidence obtained are very beneficial. In particular, in the context of the analysis, qualitative data was included and used as part of the analytical process.

The researchers could obtain more reliable information through the observation method, because the scenario was not an artificial one and the researchers merely observed covertly in which, when observed by the researchers, visitors did not behave in contrary words and deeds. Their actions were genuine. The method of observation involves physical or visual observation of what folks genuinely do or what incidents occur throughout a behavior or consumption scenario (Hair Jr, 2019). Physical observation is a technique that requires the researchers to remain and mingle in the area of Penang House of Music and observing the surroundings in a non-judgmental manner, but not interacting or communicating with the participants in the specified area.

In this study, the researchers intended to observe the whole displays, exhibits, layouts, technologies, and equipment. Apart from this, visitors' behavioral patterns are observed privately, without their knowledge, and during their visits to the museum. This is to ensure that their acts and moves would be natural. It is a normal case scenario that a person will act naturally when they do not realize that they are being observed. Therefore, through this method, the research can obtain primary sources which are vital for analysis.

Subsequently, by using the organized monitored inquiries for the candidates, face-to-face scheduled interviews were used when it comes to obtaining the fundamental information. The interview is a methodology used to gather essential data, as the analysis entails performing a thorough evaluation and conducting the independent inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2015). The researchers applied the technique where Q & A was used to acquire the qualitative information. Hence, the researchers prepared in-depth interview appointments at the respective offices of the interviewees.

4. Findings and Discussion

A huge number of established museums in the state of Penang in 2021 are recorded as many as 41 museums, which include 21 interactive museums (Table 1), and other types of museums. Besides, it is exceeding the number of interactive museums in other neighboring states which are greater regions such as the states of Kedah and Perak. In 2014 and above, most interactive museums in Penang were established in significant numbers.

Consequently, a total of 18 interactive museums have been opened throughout the year before 2019. Most of the interactive museums in Penang are concentrated in the capital area of Georgetown since this is the center of attractions popularly visited by tourists and locals. On top of this, it is listed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in the historical metropolitan city of Penang Island.

Table 1. List of Interactive Museums in Penang

Name of interactive museum	Year of establishment	Location
1. Glass Museum	2002	6, Jalan Burma, George Town, 10050 George Town
2. Camera Museum	2013	49, Muntri St, Georgetown, 10200 George Town
3. Made in Penang Interactive Museum	2013	3, Pengkalan Weld, George Town, 10300 George Town, Pulau Pinang
4. Penang 3D Trick Art Museum	2014	10, Lebu Penang, George Town, 10200 George Town,
5. Asia Camera Museum	2014	1st Floor, 71, Lebu Armenian, Georgetown, 10200 George Town, Penang
6. Teochew Puppet & Opera	2014	122, Lebu Armenian, George Town, 10200 George Town

House		
7. Ghost Museum	2015	57, Lebu Melayu, George Town
8. Upside down Museum	2015	45, Lebu Kimberley, George Town
9. Penang Tunnel Museum	2015	39, Jalan Green Hall, George Town
10. 5D Interactive World	2015	F, 29, Jalan Dato Keramat, Georgetown, 10150 George Town
11. Wonderfood Museum	2016	49, Lebu Pantai, George Town
12. PG Gold Museum	2016	95, Lebu Bishop, George Town
13. Penang House of Music	2016	Komtar, L4-02, Level 4, Jalan Penang, George Town, 10000 George Town
14. Tech Dome Penang	2016	Geodesic Dome, KOMTAR, Jalan Penang, 10000 George Town
15. Gohkhaki Childhood Museum	2016	16F-01, Thean Teik Hwy, Bandar Baru Ayer Itam, 10600 George Town
16. Penang Fun-Filled Wax Museum	2016	Jalan Dato Kerama, 10150 Dato' Kramat, Georgetown
17. Teddy Ville Museum	2016	56, Jalan Low Yat, Puncak Ria, 11100 Batu Ferringhi
18. 3D Glow in the Dark Museum	2017	145, Lebu Kimberley, George Town
19. Magic World Penang	2017	193, Lebu Victoria, George Town, 10300 George Town
20. Penang 3D Chocolate Museum	2019	30, Lebu Light, George Town
21. Wizard Museum of Magic & Illusions	2019	12, Gat Lebu Cecil, 10300 George Town

Interactive Models applied at Penang House of Music

This musical theme museum at the Penang House of Music has several fascinating interactive collections featuring technological advancement where such collections are not accessible in other state museums in Malaysia. In this phenomenal museum, the interactive exhibition is divided into several main sections, namely musical instruments, cultural instruments, and seminars. Hence, Virtual Reality and Augmented reality are one of the interactive exhibits in the Penang House of Music which is very appealing to visitors. In any museum in Penang or Malaysia, this implemented feature is very hard to obtain because it requires a high level of expertise to manage it as well as massive expenses.

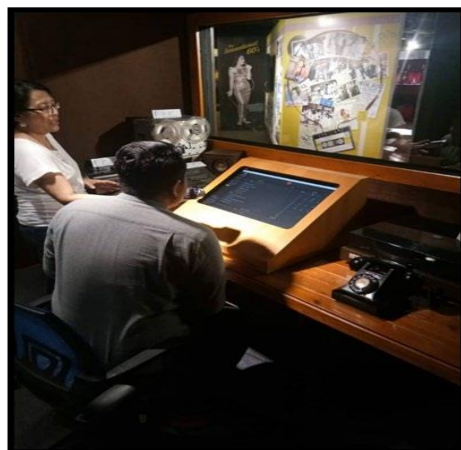


Figure 3. Visitors in the Radio Room at Penang House of Music

Another fascinating part of Penang's House of Music includes mural paintings of notable Penangites musicians from the past, in which some of them are familiar faces of Malaysia and the state of the Penang entertainment industry. Among the popular musician, icons include native Penang-born Allahyarham Tan Sri P. Ramlee, Ahmad Nawab, Robert Tan, Rajamoney Brothers, and many more. Nevertheless, these mural paintings are not the typical average mural paintings that can be seen on the wall in the city streets or galleries. The visitors only have to use the available scan feature in their smartphones by scanning a particular part of the painting.

Several famous songs from the musicians will then be played automatically on their smartphones. These sophisticated and innovative technologies cannot be found in any available museums in Malaysia, henceforth the uniqueness is beyond compare. Not only that, but the museum also offers other interactive features which are enjoyable yet mind-blowing for all sorts of visitors whether it is the younger visitors or the older visitors.

Other fascinating interactives features at this sui generis museum is the digital Potehi display, Listening Chair which is been surrounded by sentimental and retro music, listening doom and all types of musical instruments for diverse genre and traditions. The exhibited features can be photographed, touched, and played with, for instance, Sompoton, Yue Qin, Saxophone, Ukulele, and many more. The environment of Penang House of Music makes it much easier for visitors to focus entirely on the works of art on display and appreciate more of their visits by displaying a wide range of musical instruments as exhibitions.



Figure 4. An interactive Cinema Room exhibition at Penang House of Music

In the usual case, the visitors consist of a group of preschoolers, being accompanied by their teachers. This interactive museum also received visitors from elementary and secondary schools. Most of them came here for educational purposes, under school trips, guided by one or more teachers, depending on the number of children. Nonetheless, the academic community and foreign tourists were the groups that contributed the most to the total number of visitors to this museum. Besides, the education elites usually came from local governments and private universities. The majority of visitors are academic researchers and undergraduate students from universities such as Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, University of Melbourne Australia, and Nanyang University Singapore. Most of the researchers and higher education students came to utilize the resources and collections for their studies.

Nevertheless, sadly, the number of museum visitors has reduced dramatically since the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 that had affected many people worldwide. There are even several days where there have been no visitors at all at the Penang House of Music. This interactive museum typically receives visitors from different ethnicities and countries where adolescents, professionals, and international visitors are the majority number of visitors compared to Malaysian citizens. Foreign visitors came from Australia, Japan, China, Canada, Great Britain, and several others.

Music lovers also contribute to the highest percentage of visitors who came by at Penang House of Music. They came here to experience and use the musical instruments available. Foreigners have desires and were curious to experience the local Malaysian instruments while local visitors wanted to feast their eyes upon the rarely seen instruments of the past. Furthermore, they also appear to be receiving quite a several researchers almost every month. They came to conduct researches as well as using the equipment provided. Consequently, a small number of visitors among young kids were recorded by Penang House of Music as well and the number is very insignificant compared to adults. Hence, senior citizens, who are among the tourists at this museum are usually aficionados of music, professionals, and retired workers.

In the Virtual Reality Area, Cinema Room, and Radio Room, where these exhibits are among the core attractions present in this museum, the visitors had shown faces of enjoyment, thrill, and amazement to experience each exhibition hall. In a broader term, visitors at Penang House of Music will visit on a massive scale on major holidays, school holidays, and local travel companies that include this museum as one of the places to visit in Penang in their calendars.



Figure 5. Visitors at the Penang House of Music attentively listening to the explanation by the curator.

Meanwhile, some visitors spend lots of time discovering several displays, particularly in the musical instrument and Digital Potehi, where this group of people will normally go to the instruments in which they are interested after they have fully completed the entire tour within the museum and started to engage along with their acquaintances within 30 to 45 minutes. Most of Penang House of Music's visual interactions are still in decent condition and are among the core attractions in this interactive museum. For instance, considering the very outdated technology that has been used, the moving image in the Cinema Room is still in an extremely excellent way, as well as capable to provide excellent visual.

From the observation, the engagement of visitors in all range of exhibitions and display practices at Penang House of Music is very extraordinary, as well as having excellent feedback, especially by the foreign tourists. Almost all visitors to this museum had actively participated in all exhibitions displayed, particularly in the Virtual Reality Room, Digital Potehi, Radio Room, Musical Equipment, and much more. Numerous visitors engage and take an interest in this type of interactive exhibition. This is because the musical museum is based

on interactive exhibits where the straightforward engagement of visitors is required for almost all exhibitions available. This circumstance will potentially provide the visitors with an unforgettable experience.

5. Conclusion

In a broader sense, it is strongly felt that Penang House of Music has been one of the most visited interactive museums in Penang. This sophisticated museum exhibits a world-class quality of interactive models and collections which qualify it as one of the most exceptional museums in Penang and throughout Malaysia to be visited. One of the few interactive models available includes Radio Room, where this exhibition is rare in any museums in Malaysia and the first of its kind. Without any doubt, it has certainly become a visitors' magnet for Penang House of Music

To illustrate, the visitors at the Penang House of Music are fond of engaging themselves thoroughly when it comes to interacting with art installations and exhibitions. In addition to this, visitors at this interactive museum came from different categories ranging from school students, academicians, and music lovers. Theoretically, interactive exhibitions at Penang House of Music provide visitors with crossdisciplinary activities that provide both physical stimulation and intercultural communication for all kinds of visitors. This feature has inevitably influenced the visitors of various generations, ethnicities, countries, and educational backgrounds.

As such, the interactive display model can improve visitor behavior patterns, while the design and models practiced at Penang House of Music can attract more returners. This because the models are built in a sophisticated way and user-friendly. A conducive environment also plays a more suitable role in ensuring the visitors interact and play with all the musical instruments provided such as violin, double bass, clarinet, Nadaswaram, Erhu, and much more.

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