

Modern architectural tourism in Singapore

Keith Kay Hin Tan and Camelia May Li Kusumo

Abstract

Purpose – Existing tourism studies focusing on Southeast Asia often emphasize the culture, history and heritage of the region or its natural beauty and cuisine, most of which are often viewed as exotic through a Western lens. By contrast, this interdisciplinary study looks at the untapped potential for modern architectural tourism in Singapore as a fascinating and increasingly authentic way of understanding how the next generation of Singaporean residents will live in their land-scarce city-state. This study aims to highlight the importance of modern architecture as a tourism product in a globalized Asian city.

Design/methodology/approach – It engages with visiting architects and their local facilitator to examine the touristic potential energy of cutting-edge residential buildings in Singapore from an intra-Asian viewpoint. By also identifying practical design solutions to promote modern architectural tourism that will have a positive impact on city branding, this study opens the door for future research regarding Southeast Asia's rapidly changing modern architecture and urban landscape, and how these can be made attractive for its important tourism industry.

Findings – The findings suggest that just as Singapore's cultural diversity has long been viewed as a touristic asset, its authentic, escapist, exotic and spectacular contemporary residential architecture, if well managed, presented and designed, can provide a unique place for sustainable community interactions between locals and visitors, which will help Singapore develop a unique city brand attractive to architectural tourists and even repeat visitors, through a new concept for authenticity in a global city.

Originality/value – This cross-disciplinary study linking tourism and architecture explores modern architectural tourism in Singapore, specifically in relation to residential buildings where locals and visitors can interact.

Keywords Singapore, Authenticity, Residential buildings, City branding, Architourism

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Whereas most tourism studies focusing on Southeast Asia have emphasized the importance of traditional architecture and the natural environment as representing the tangible heritage of the region (Hitchcock *et al.*, 2010), or culture and cuisine as representing its intangible heritage (Henderson, 2019), studies examining the importance of contemporary architecture to the visitor are relatively rare. When these do happen, they are mostly confined to academic works specific to the built environment, or otherwise focus on the effects of colonialism and nationalism on buildings designed in the post-independence period (Chang and Imran, 2019).

Writers such as Nima *et al.* (2017) as well as Canizaro (2007) maintain, however, that authenticity is still the central concept of regionalism in modern architecture. Contemporary modern architecture in Southeast Asia is, moreover, vastly different from the "International Style" that extensively promoted the use of steel and glass facades that dominated modern architecture between the 1930s and 1960s, especially in North America (Frampton, 1992), but which has more recently been criticized due to its lack of place-making and environmental considerations.

Indeed, Frampton (2007) further premised that instead of the international style, the newer movement toward a critical regionalism in architecture is more properly defined by a culture's unique identity, manner of place-making and architectonic strategies. These echo

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