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Communication and visitor factors contributing towards heritage visitors’ mindfulness

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of communication factors (e.g., uses of questions and multisensory media) and visitor factors (e.g., high level of interest and visualisation) on visitors’ mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to a state of mind in which an individual is actively processing information from their environment. Past literature has suggested that being mindful helps increase visitor understanding, learning and satisfaction. While a number of studies have explored the effects of communication factors on mindfulness, little is understood about the effects of visitor factors. Moreover, most previous studies of mindfulness have employed qualitative research methodologies. The present study relies on a survey of 390 local and international tourists to George Town, Penang (Malaysia) – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) has been employed to analyse the data. The results demonstrate the significant effect of both communication factors and visitor factors on mindfulness. The findings of the study suggest that visitor mindfulness might be improved by incorporating questions, multisensory media, level of interest and visualisations in the design of the visitor experience at the heritage sites.

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Mindfulness; communication factors; visitor factors; World Heritage Site; George Town; UNESCO

Introduction

Mindfulness has been proposed as a way of managing the tourism experience to improve learning, understanding and tourist satisfaction. According to McIntosh (1999), Moscardo (1996), and Tung and Ritchie (2011), mindfulness may help to facilitate the process of enhancing visitors’ learning and appreciation of tourism sites. Indeed, it is crucial to inform tourists about the consequences of certain behaviours. Mindfulness may comprise an effective method through which destination providers can manage visitors at heritage tourism destinations.

Although heritage tourism is primarily concerned with the visitor experience, heritage tourism research tends to be heavily focused on the communicative aspect of the experience. In other words, heritage tourism research looks to investigate how best to present exhibits and to provide interpretations of that heritage. Little is known, however, about the visitor’s internal experience of a heritage site or how these internal experiences affect mindfulness. Therefore, this study hopes to elucidate a more holistic understanding of mindfulness with respect to both communicative and visitor factors.

This study investigates how visitors learn about and develop an understanding of the unique culture and heritage of the heritage sites that they visit. These reflections on learning and understanding