

The Night Market as a Space of Nostalgia Tourism: Study Case in Tanjung Uban

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the role of the Tanjung Uban Night Market as a space for nostalgia tourism. The research focuses on identifying how three main elements local culinary heritage, market atmosphere, and social interaction act as triggers of nostalgia, and how these experiences influence perceived value, satisfaction, place attachment, and revisit intention.

Research methods: Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected participants, consisting of local visitors, vendors, and domestic tourists. A thematic analysis approach was used employed to identify patterns and themes related to nostalgic experiences.

Results and discussions: The findings revealed that culinary specialties such as otak-otak, gonggong, and traditional snacks, together with the lively yet simple atmosphere and strong social interactions, serve as powerful nostalgia triggers. These elements evoked emotional connections that enhanced visitor satisfaction, fostered cultural appreciation, and strengthened place attachment. The study highlights the importance of integrating nostalgia-based experiences into tourism strategies, positioning night markets as cultural and emotional spaces that foster visitor loyalty.

Implication: The results emphasize the importance of integrating nostalgia-based experiences into local tourism development strategies. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders in Bintan should consider branding night markets not only as culinary destinations but also as cultural and emotional tourism spaces to enhance visitor engagement and loyalty.

Keywords: Nostalgia Tourism, Night Market, Culinary Heritage, Tanjung Uban.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary tourism has evolved to emphasize experiential and emotional value (Rather et al., 2019). Nostalgia tourism, where travelers seek experiences that evoke personal and collective memories, represents a significant trend within this evolution (Lee et al., 2023). The Tanjung Uban Night Market serves as a traditional public space with substantial potential to facilitate nostalgia-based experiences, thereby strengthening local cultural identity.

Functioning as both an economic hub and socio-cultural arena, the market supports local vendors while enhancing sense of belonging among visitors. Its culinary offerings—otak-otak, gonggong, laksa, and traditional snacks act as powerful memory triggers that connect individuals to shared histories and cultural values (Liu et al., 2022). The market's vibrant yet modest atmosphere, characterized by distinctive lighting, aromas, and crowd dynamics, creates an immersive nostalgic ambience. Social interactions between vendors and visitors foster togetherness, bridging present experiences with past traditions.



Figure 1. The Activities and Atmosphere of Tanjung Uban Night Market
 [Source: Author, 2025]

Recent conceptual developments identify nostalgia as a critical bridge between memory and identity, reinforcing social connectedness and belonging (Moreno et al., 2024). In Southeast Asia, night markets function as socio-cultural hubs where culinary heritage, vibrant atmospheres, and interpersonal interactions converge to create economic and cultural value (Mwesiumo et al., 2021).

Previous studies indicate that nostalgic experiences in tourism enhance visitor satisfaction, reinforce authenticity perceptions, and encourage loyalty and revisit intention (Yu et al., 2023). However, empirical research exploring night markets as nostalgia tourism spaces, particularly in Indonesia, remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Tanjung Uban Night Market serves as a venue for nostalgia tourism, where culinary elements, atmospheric ambiance, and social interactions collectively trigger nostalgic memories and shape visitors' perceived value, satisfaction, place attachment, and revisit intention.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection conducted through field observation and semi-structured interviews. Participants 20 respondents were purposively selected, consisting of 10 local visitors, 5 vendors, and 5 domestic tourists who had visited Tanjung Uban Night Market. For the data collection In-depth interviews were carried out between March and June 2025, focusing on visitor experiences, nostalgic memories, and perceptions of the night market. Thematic analysis approach was used to categorize findings into three main themes : culinary elements, atmosphere, and social interactions. Data triangulation was applied to increase validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile
 Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	9	45.0

Variables	Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	Female	11	55.0
	< 25	5	25.0
	25 – 34	7	35.0
	35 – 44	5	25.0
	≥ 45	3	15.0
Respondent Type	Local Visitor	10	50.0
	Vendor	5	25.0
	Domestic Tourist	5	25.0
Frequency of Visit	First-time visitor	6	30.0
	2–3 times	9	45.0
	> 3 times	5	25.0

(Source: Author, 2025)

The demographic distribution shows that female respondents (55%) slightly outnumbered males (45%), reflecting findings in prior studies that women often express stronger nostalgic sentiments in tourism experiences. Most participants were in the productive age groups of 25–34 years (35%) and 35–44 years (25%), indicating that nostalgia tourism appeals significantly to adults who associate night markets with childhood or family memories. Local visitors made up half of the sample (50%), with the remainder comprising vendors (25%) and domestic tourists (25%), thus ensuring a multi-perspective representation. In terms of frequency of visits, the majority (45%) had visited the night market 2–3 times, suggesting emerging loyalty, while 25% were frequent visitors (>3 times), reinforcing the role of night markets in fostering repeat visitation.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Nostalgia Tourism Elements in Tanjung Uban Night Market

Theme	Category	Findings / Description	Sample Quote from Respondents
Culinary Heritage	Traditional Food as Nostalgia Trigger	Local foods such as <i>otak-otak</i> , <i>gonggong</i> , <i>laksa</i> , and traditional snacks reminded visitors of childhood and family gatherings.	“When I eat <i>otak-otak</i> here, it feels like going back to my childhood when my parents used to take me to the night market.” (Visitor, age 32)
	Symbol of Local Identity	Culinary products reinforce Bintan cultural identity and act as heritage symbols.	“The food here represents Bintan. It is not just about taste but about identity and tradition.” (Tourist, age 41)
Market Atmosphere	Sensory Experience	The simple lighting, crowded stalls, and traditional music created a nostalgic ambience.	“The lights and sounds here remind me of the old times, it feels like a traditional fair from the

Theme	Category	Findings / Description	Sample Quote from Respondents
Social Interaction	Emotional Satisfaction	Atmosphere evoked positive emotions and a sense of joy among visitors.	past.” (Visitor, age 28) “I feel happy and comfortable here because it reminds me of how life used to be simpler.” (Vendor, age 45)
	Vendor–Visitor Interaction	Conversations and bargaining processes created emotional bonds and cultural intimacy.	“Talking with the sellers makes me feel connected to the community, not just as a customer.” (Tourist, age 36)
	Collective Memory	Night market provided shared experiences across generations, strengthening collective memory.	“Coming here with my children feels like passing on my own memories to them.” (Visitor, age 40)

(Source: Author, 2025)

The thematic analysis highlights three main nostalgic elements: culinary heritage, market atmosphere, and social interaction. Culinary experiences emerged as the most powerful nostalgia triggers, linking visitors’ present experiences with childhood memories and cultural identity. The atmosphere of the market created by lighting, sounds, and aromas was described as immersive and emotionally satisfying. Meanwhile, social interactions, particularly with vendors and among families, reinforced collective memory and intergenerational connections. Three elements collectively create nostalgic experiences.

1. Culinary Elements as Nostalgia Triggers

Culinary elements were found to be the strongest trigger of nostalgic experiences at the Tanjung Uban Night Market. As shown in Table 1, the majority of visitors (35%) were aged between 25–34 years, a group that frequently associates traditional food with childhood and family gatherings. In line with this, respondents emphasized that local dishes such as otak-otak and nasi lemak evoked strong emotional memories:

“Every time I eat otak-otak here, it reminds me of my childhood when my mother used to buy it for me after school” (Local Visitor, female, 27 years). This personal memory was echoed by vendors who saw food as a medium of cultural continuity: “We still use the same recipe as our parents, so people come here to taste the food they grew up with” (Vendor, male, 45 years).

These statements highlight that the culinary offerings not only satisfied hunger but also provided symbolic connections to the past. Prior studies also suggest that food is a key carrier of nostalgia in tourism because it combines taste, memory, and identity (Sims, 2021; Jang & Kim, 2022). Consequently, culinary experiences at the

night market enhanced visitor satisfaction by creating affective bonds, thereby increasing the perceived value of the visit and strengthening revisit intention

2. Atmosphere Creating Authentic Ambience

The atmosphere of the Tanjung Uban Night Market played a vital role in reinforcing nostalgic experiences. According to Table 1, 25% of respondents were aged 35–44 years, a group that frequently linked sensory experiences with childhood memories of night markets. Respondents described the unique atmosphere through lighting, music, and traditional stall arrangements:

“The dim lights and music here feel just like the night markets I went to with my family when I was little” (Domestic Tourist, male, 38 years).

Such sensory triggers have been identified in prior research as powerful cues for nostalgia, as they enable visitors to relive past moments in the present (Cho, 2020; Fairhurst, 2023). The layout of stalls and the smell of freshly cooked food also created an immersive environment that promoted relaxation and comfort. Vendors reinforced this perception by intentionally maintaining traditional decorations:

“We try to keep the stalls looking the same as before, so people feel they are coming back to the old days” (Vendor, female, 41 years).

These findings suggest that the atmosphere did not only support commercial transactions but also facilitated affective experiences, enhancing perceived authenticity and strengthening attachment to the place

Multi-sensory cues (visual, auditory, olfactory) constructed authentic experiences that generated emotional satisfaction (Mwesiumo et al., 2021). The lively crowd, simple lighting, and ambient sounds created an authentic nostalgic ambience. Visitors compared the market's atmosphere to past communal gatherings, generating emotional satisfaction and joy.

3. Social Interaction Fostering Attachment

Social interaction emerged as another key dimension fostering attachment and repeat visitation. Based on Table 1, 45% of respondents had visited the market 2–3 times, and 25% more than three times. This frequency indicates that community belonging and social bonds strongly influenced loyalty. Visitors explained that conversations with vendors and other customers created a sense of connection:

“I don’t just come here for the food, but also to chat with vendors I’ve known since I was young” (Local Visitor, male, 32 years). Similarly, tourists emphasized that night markets provided opportunities to feel part of local culture:

“When I talk with locals while eating, I feel like I belong to the community, even though I’m just visiting” (Domestic Tourist, female, 29 years).

Such findings align with existing studies that highlight the role of social interaction in strengthening place attachment and revisit intention in cultural and heritage tourism (Nguyen & Lee, 2023). In this case, nostalgia was not only an individual emotional experience but also a shared social practice that bound people together.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Tanjung Uban Night Market functions not only as a transactional economic space but also as an emotional and cultural arena that provides nostalgia-based tourism experiences. Culinary heritage, market atmosphere, and social interaction serve as central triggers of nostalgia, which enhance visitor satisfaction, cultural appreciation, and revisit intention.

This study investigated the role of the Tanjung Uban Night Market as a space of nostalgia tourism, focusing on three key aspects: local culinary heritage, market atmosphere, and social interaction. The findings demonstrate that culinary elements such as *otak-otak*, *gonggong*, and *laksa* act as powerful nostalgia triggers, while the sensory ambience of the market and interpersonal interactions foster emotional satisfaction and collective memory. Collectively, these elements contribute to perceived value, visitor satisfaction, place attachment, and revisit intention.

Policymakers and tourism stakeholders in Bintan should integrate nostalgia-based branding into tourism strategies, positioning night markets as cultural and emotional destinations. Efforts to preserve culinary traditions and enhance the market's atmospheric qualities can further strengthen its appeal. Future research could explore nostalgia tourism in other local contexts or employ mixed-methods approaches for broader insights.

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