

Historic architecture in tourism consumption

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Abstract

Purpose – Historic architecture is one of the most prevalent human-made attractions and image attributes that the tourism industry substantially benefits from. Moreover, this attraction creates a critical value in augmenting destination competitiveness. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss historic architecture in relation to guest experience and to find out if historic buildings used as hotels are, physically, elements of attraction. The findings reveal that historic buildings used as hotels have a specific potential in attracting guests, and these buildings are mainly considered positive by guests. Hotel guests are satisfied by the physical – i.e., architectural and atmospheric – features of hotels serving in historic buildings. This paper will help readers rethink how historic architecture plays a key role in tourism consumption. The paper uniquely seeks to delve into the potential of historic hotel buildings as elements of attraction by examining over 9.8 thousand comments of hotel guests.

Keywords Tourism, Hospitality industry, Historic architecture, Historic hotel buildings, Tourist attraction

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

It is the attractions of a destination that often serve as a catalyst for tourist visits (Cooper *et al.*, 2008). Historic architecture consists of human-made attractions (Cooper *et al.*, 2008) that are considered as attributes of destination image (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner and Brent Ritchie, 2003). The literature suggests that historic architecture is crucial to destination attraction. For example, Holloway and Humphreys (2012) state that when considering the appeal of a destination for tourists, probably, one of the things that people first think of is the historical and architectural features of the destination. To Ye and Tussyadiah (2011), historic architecture and heritage sites are more than just places of interest; they are living elements that could give tourists a sense of pride.

Aside from that, historic architecture is also important because it creates a high economic value (Yabanci, 2015). Holloway and Humphreys (2012) state that the Tower of London alone receives over 2.4 million visitors yearly that conspicuously contributes to the large economy of London city.

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Historic hotel buildings or more broadly heritage hotels (Xie and Shi, 2020) have been popular venues of lodging in the modern hospitality industry. Timothy and Teye (2009) estimate that renovated or remodeled historic buildings that once had a different function are one of the most demanded genres of tourist accommodation and much of this is part of a broader movement toward presenting historical buildings and using them for alternative purposes. Apart from such an estimation, they also suggest that such hotels appeal to history or heritage buffs because of their previous functions such as a barn, factory, store, castle, mansion, convent, post office, church or even a prison. Some scholars agree that heritage hotels, as part of a country's legacy, have become important venues for introducing cultural and historical backgrounds to modern society (Xie and Shi, 2019; Chhabra, 2015).

Even though heritage lodging, historic hotels and other such tourist accommodations are phenomena of the tourism business, the literature on heritage lodging is rather limited (Lee and Chhabra, 2015; Xie and Shi, 2020) and lacks a well-established systematic approach. A notable early study by Sulzby (1960) discussed the historical backgrounds of several historic Alabama hotels and resorts. Another early study by Brown (1980) argued the issue of rehabilitation of historic hotels by focusing a case project on the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Djuff and Morrison (2001) focused on the histories of historic hotels and chalets in the Glacier National Park. Some other studies that concentrated on historic hotels' histories were conducted by Ibbotson (2007), Wallach *et al.* (2008); Clark (2011), van Ommeren (2013); Oswell (2014), Betti and Sauer (2015); and Mofford (2019).

Peleggi (2005) critically argued the renovation and resuscitation of some historic hotels in southeast Asia with a reference to authenticity. In a similar vein, Ong *et al.* delved into the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings (see also ab Wahab *et al.* (2016) and Ghaderi *et al.* (2020)) by concentrating on a case project for reviving the historical Lloyd Hotel in Amsterdam. Juric (2019), who aimed to understand how tourists co-created authentic travel experiences through their stay in a historic hotel, found that age, education and occupation had a significant role in how they co-created and assessed their authentic travel experiences. Moreover, it was found that most participants agreed that their stay in a historic hotel was a valuable element of their travel experience and contributed to their travel authenticity. It was also noted that the role of historic hotels in the co-creation of their guests' authentic travel experiences varied depending on the intensity of tourists' corporeal and affective engagement with the hotel setting. Hotel managements' role was significant in the co-creation process. Managements' performance affected guests' emotions and behaviors during their stays that was a result of an effective synthesis of tangible and intangible elements. Some of the participants were more influenced by aspects of "performance," such as service, narrative or hotel's different aesthetical components, especially if perceived as peculiar. Hussein and Hapsari (2021), aiming to explore the dimensions of heritage experiential quality and examine the relationships between heritage experiential quality and heritage experiential satisfaction, found that heritage experiential quality was important in affecting behavioral intentions, heritage experiential satisfaction, and value, and hotel image.

One important subject that still lacks research is the demand-side of historic hotel buildings. An earlier study by Dincer and Ertugral (2003) indicated that heritage hotels created a high demand (also suggested by Timothy and Teye (2009)) and were preferred by relatively high-income and more literate people, and the occupancy rate of such buildings was higher and more stable. Ahmed (2016), focusing to evaluate the historic hotels' brand images by analyzing hotel guests' comments, identified positive and negative images with regard to rooms, service, food and beverage, history, location and some behavioral intentions, such as retention, recommendations to other customers and hotel management. They found that words appearing most frequently in the comments were related to rooms,

location, service, food and beverage and history. Along with that, a high number of adjectives used were construed as positive, e.g. “great,” “good,” “beautiful,” “lovely,” “nice,” “amazing,” “excellent,” “best” and “well.” [Elsayed \(2019\)](#), aiming to identify if historical hotels and the application of using local heritage touch in the hotels’ design can attract guests, found that hotels’ historical attributes were significant in influencing hotel guests. [See and Goh \(2019\)](#), who attempted to analyze tourists’ intentions to visit heritage hotels, found that perceived price, experience quality, prior knowledge, perceived authenticity, social influence and perceived value exerted positive and significant effects on tourists’ intention to visit heritage hotels. [Perianez-Cristobal et al. \(2020\)](#), seeking to demonstrate the importance of lodging service users’ interests in non-hotel resources linked to hotels by analyzing Spanish hotels in historical defensive structures, concluded that environmental elements and those of a heritage character are capable of strongly attracting the attention of users. The authors suggest that such an issue is of crucial importance to the effects of the design of the establishments’ competitive advantages.

In the light of the discussion above, the purpose of this paper is to appraise historic hotel buildings in relation to guest experience, and thus to find out if historic buildings are, physically, elements of attraction in the eyes of hotel guests. In other words, the study seeks to understand how hotel guests construe historic buildings as hotel facilities. In what follows, we initially provide a further theoretical approach to the subject and then focus on the main question by examining the guest comments on 11 historic hotel buildings from Istanbul city that were retrieved from one of the leading online travel platforms. The research question is as follows:

- RQ1.* (a) Are hotel guests attracted, (b) sentimentally influenced, (c) and satisfied by the physical attributes of historic hotel buildings?

Traveler motivations to hotel selection

Several studies in the literature have attempted to understand the motives that affect travelers’ hotel choices. The literature revolves around two main traveler classifications that are business and leisure/pleasure travelers. An early study by [Lewis \(1985\)](#), that aimed to understand the factors that travelers consider when making a hotel choice, revealed that business travelers indicated “services quality” (i.e. “room and bath condition,” “upscale services,” “reservations,” “image” and “amenities”) while leisure travelers pointed to “quiet” as the most important determinant factor in choosing a hotel over another. [Knutson \(1988\)](#), also focusing to identify what attracts travelers to a hotel, revealed that business travelers considered a “clean and comfortable room,” “convenient location,” “safety” and “security,” “prompt and courteous service,” “friendliness” and “room rates,” while leisure travelers regarded “clean and comfortable rooms,” “safety” and “security,” “room rates,” “prompt and courteous service,” “convenient location,” “friendliness” and “recreation facilities” as important factors in initial hotel selection – somewhat diverging from the previous study. [McCleary et al. \(1993\)](#), whose purpose was to understand business traveler behavior by studying the situation under which a hotel purchase is made, revealed that only two surrogate variables were able to discriminate between several task situations (i.e. attend a company meeting, meet with people within/outside the company, attend trade association meeting or convention and make a sales call): “banquet/meeting facilities” and “location” – noting that the first attribute was important only if the traveler was going to the hotel to attend a meeting or convention. [Yavas and Babakus \(2005\)](#) revealed that business and leisure travelers are in incongruity with regard to hotel choice. They further found that

“general amenities,” “core service,” “convenience,” “ambiance” and “room amenities” were important factors for travelers’ hotel selection.

Jones and Chen (2011), seeking to identify the decision-making process followed by travelers selecting a hotel for a leisure stay, found that the main attributes forming the consideration set were “non-smoking,” “swimming pool,” “high-speed internet,” “hot tub,” “fitness center,” “room service” and “set price range.” The main attributes forming the choice set were “comparison,” “picture,” “reviews,” “star-ratings” and “sort by price.” They concluded that the hotel attributes were more important in forming the consideration set, while the Web attributes were more important in forming the choice set. They also included a review list of studies from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s. Some conspicuous attributes provided in the list were overall pertinent to hotels’ services, conveniences, amenities, safety and security, cleanliness and prices. Tsai *et al.* (2015) indicated that “general amenities,” “core service,” “convenience,” “room amenities” and “ambiance” were main factors for hotel selection in the eyes of both business and leisure travelers. McCartney and Ge (2016), who sought to identify what push and pull decision-making factors had a significant influence on Macao hotel selection, found that push factors, such as “relaxing psychologically,” “spacious area designed for relaxing,” “enjoying proactive service by passionate servers,” “experience hotel’s special theme” and “enjoying individualized service,” and pull factors, such as “safety and security,” “comfortable room,” “friendly staff service,” “efficient staff service” and “hotel shuttle bus,” were most significant factors for hotel selection.

Freund de Klumbis and Munsters (2004) have indicated a distinction between “box” and “boutique, design or lifestyle” hotels with regard to hotel guests’ choices. In this distinction, box hotels (characterized by the uniformity of the core and facilitating products) are recognized as epitomes of standard, while lifestyle hotels (with unique or sophisticated and innovative characteristics) are those exceeding the usual standards. In lifestyle hotels, guests are engaged in quality, surprise, adventure and history, hotel stay as experience, recognition as a guest, feeling at home by means of the software, unique selling offers and search for a specific identity. They further suggest that the guests in historic establishments “belong for the greater part to the cultural tourist target groups having a high or average interest in culture and wanting to discover, experience and broaden their knowledge of art and history during their leisure time. That is why they prefer small-scale historic accommodations with a high experience value, personal hosting and regional gastronomy.”

Method

Data collection technique

The study used a content analysis that is a technique for examining the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media (Neuman, 2014) to find out if historic hotel buildings attract guests’ attention. Overall, it focused on one parameter – comments referring to the historical features of hotel buildings, particularly in terms of their architecture and ambiance. Therefore, we looked for guests’ statements on the historical features of these buildings.

The research was carried out on a popular and world-famous online travel platform called TripAdvisor as it was decided that the website provided a suitable setting for acquiring direct and frank feedback from people in regard to their hotel-stay experiences. Hence, we first browsed five-star hotels in Istanbul using the websites’ search bar. The search bar filtered 154 hotels that met the criterion. We noted down the titles of these hotels and checked their segments on the up-to-date touristic facilities list of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. We confirmed 101 of them to be recognized as five-star or special/luxury hotels. Then, we examined and listed the hotels that were serving in historic

buildings. In the final analysis, we identified 11 hotels that were serving in rehabilitated historic buildings. Four of the hotels were classified as five-stars, and the remainder were classified as special/luxury facilities in the up-to-date touristic facilities list of the Ministry. Then, we browsed the profile pages of these hotels and recorded a total of 9,872 comments of the people that claimed to have been in these hotels to obtain data for our analysis. Each comment was reviewed, and the comments referring to the historical features of the sample buildings were delineated into positive, neutral and negative categories. Comments in these categories were then reviewed for a second time to minimize the potential bias. The three categories were quantitatively analyzed to better identify the perceptions of hotel guests toward historical hotel buildings. Further, we used NVivo 12 that is a powerful software in administering content analyses to mine the words of commenters pertinent to historical features of the samples and thus obtain a closer understanding of the results.

Why hotels in Istanbul

One reason why we chose the hotel buildings in Istanbul was that the city of Istanbul is one of the oldest cities in the world and has a rich architectural background. Having hosted several societies, such as Greeks, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines (Eastern Romans), Ottomans and finally modern Turks (Harris, 2017; Bowden, 2007; Tomlinson, 1992), Istanbul has a myriad of remaining exemplars of historic architecture. With its manifold architectural masterpieces, such as Hagia Sophia, St. Irene, the hippodrome of Constantine, Suleymaniye and Blue mosques, and Topkapi Palace, historic areas of Istanbul are included in the World Heritage List by UNESCO since 1985. Overall, Istanbul is such an open exhibition of architectural heritage consisting of a medley of historic architecture of different ages – from classical to modern and contemporary ages. So, one more reason was that Istanbul has some good examples of historic buildings in the hospitality business. Another reason we chose Istanbul was that the city is one of the places where architectural heritage suffers despite strict protection regulations. Even though there are valid rigid regulations for the protection of architectural heritage, many historic architectural properties keep disappearing somehow over time. Owing to such reasons, the historic hotel buildings of the city were some appropriate specimens for our study.

Findings

Features of the sample historic hotel buildings

We identified four five-star and seven special/luxury hotels that were serving in historic buildings in Istanbul city, as shown in Table 1. These buildings of diverse styles ranged between the first half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, and more than half of them were artifacts that emerged in the beautiful era – La Belle Époque (1871–1914).

Findings on the guests' comments

As mentioned afore, we recorded over 9.8 thousand comments relating to the sample hotels. These comments were made by people from different parts of the world who have visited Istanbul city and stayed at the listed hotels. We identified a total of 878 comments anent the historical features of the hotel buildings. These comments comprised 8.8% of the overall comments, which is not statistically significant, in general, yet not to be underrated. Particularly, comments anent the historical features of Pera Palace Hotel counted 54.8% by itself (calculated by the number of comments of the given hotel). Comments anent the historical features of the other hotels counted as follows: Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet, 12.8%; Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul, 12.6%; W Istanbul, 5.5%; Four

Hotel title	Segment	Year/period*	Style
The Galata Hotel Istanbul-MGALLERY	Special/luxury	After 1830, prob. 1836	Unidentified
Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul	Five stars	1855 onward, 1871	Eclectic
Four Seasons Istanbul at the Bosphorus	Five stars	1855 onward, 1871	Unidentified
W Istanbul	Special/luxury	1870, 1874/75	Eclectic
10 Karakoy Istanbul-A Morgans Original	Special/luxury	1875	Unidentified
Pera Palace Hotel	Special/luxury	1892–1893	Beaux-Arts/Fin de Siècle
Ajia Hotel	Special/luxury	1898	Empire/Neoclassical
Tomtom Suites	Special/luxury	1901	Unidentified
Legacy Ottoman Hotel	Five stars	1911–1926	Neoclassical Turkish
Crowne Plaza Istanbul Old City	Five stars	1919–1922	Eclectic
Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet	Special/luxury	1919	Neoclassical Turkish

Source: *Akay and Ardicoglu (2012), Akin *et al.* (2007); Alioglu (2015), Altan and Celik (2000); Arkiv (2020), Arli (1994); Batur (1994), Bohle and Dimog (2016); Buyukdigan and Cavus (2016), Can (1999); Deleon (1996), Freely (2011); Girardelli (2012), Gorgulu (2003); Gulenaz (2011), Gulersoy (1992); Gulersoy (1994), Kocu (1946); King (2014), Kuban (1970); Kuruyazici (2010), Mizrak (2015); Onel (1994), Ozulu (2011); Senol (2005), Senyurt (2012); Sezer and Ozyalciner (2010), Sey (1994); Sozen (1984), The Galata Istanbul (2020); Yavuz (2009), Yavuz and Ozkan (2005); Yerasimos (2007)

Table 1.
Sample historic hotel
buildings

Seasons Istanbul at the Bosphorus, 3.6%; Legacy Ottoman Hotel, 3.1%; Tomtom Suites, 2.2%; The Galata Hotel Istanbul-MGALLERY, 1.3%; Crowne Plaza Istanbul Old City, 1.3%; 10 Karakoy Istanbul-A Morgans Original, 1.2%, and Ajia Hotel, 0.9%.

Apart from that, most of the positive comments were related to Pera Palace Hotel (58.8%), Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet (12.9%) and Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul (10.8%). Pera Palace is one of the oldest hotels in Istanbul, which was originally designed to host the passengers of the legendary Orient Express. This historical hotel is globally popular for having hosted several world-famous celebrities throughout history and having the first electric lift in Istanbul. Therefore, the hotel, with such features, has awoken special feelings in its guests, which were observed in the pertinent comments. Four Seasons at Sultanahmet and Ciragan Palace Kempinski are two other historical buildings with very rich historical backgrounds that highly draw the attention of their guests. For example, Four Seasons at Sultanahmet is a historical Ottoman prison that was built in the 1910s and had confined several famous Turkish writers throughout its history. Such an excitatory history has stimulated guests much. Similarly, Ciragan Palace Kempinski is an authentic, sumptuous Ottoman palace that was built on the banks of the Bosphorus during the reign of Abdulaziz in 1871 that housed royals. The hotel, with its rich history and elegant design, has received much regard from its guests. The remainders consisted of 17.3% (see Table 2). Along with that, most of the neutral comments were related to Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul with 39.6% and Pera Palace Hotel with 16.9%, while a significant number of the negative comments were related to W Istanbul (41.6%). W is a luxury-brand hotel of Marriott International mostly renowned for its vibrant and energetic concept that combines music, fashion and design (W Hotels, 2020). In line with that, W Istanbul has attempted to mingle its lively concept with history and turn a hundred-and-

With regard to the positive and neutral comments, we decided to include only the sentences that explicitly referred to the historical features of the buildings. In other words, we only included the positive comments of people who were seemingly history-aware, and that highlighted the histories of the buildings wittingly. Hence, we ignored the comments with solitary modifiers, such as “former,” “formerly converted,” and “period,” even though these were subtly referring to the historical features of the buildings. To note that, there were quite a few commenters who referred to the features of the buildings in such a way. We also identified some oxymoronic expressions that made the given comments inconsistent in meaning. However, we included such comments in the categories that they naturally inclined.

Statistics, as shown in Table 2, reveal that positive comments significantly outweigh the other two categories in percentage, which indicates that most of the guests had positive attitudes toward historic hotel buildings. The overall positive comments (91.2%) indicate that these hotel guests enjoyed staying in historic buildings and were contented with them at different levels. Apart from that, neutral comments (6%) also outweigh negative comments. Negative comments (2.7%) constituted the weakest portion of the overall rating, which suggests that a small number of the guests had gripes about historic hotel buildings and seemingly did not like staying at these edifices.

Figure 2 indicates the most used words in positive comments. The words “hotel” and “hotels” are at the top of the list with 6.7% (902 counts). The words “historic,” “historical” and “historically” were the second most used (3.5%, 468 counts) and “history” the third most used word (2.7%, 362 counts). The words “beautiful,” “beautifully” and “beauty” were also some of the most used ones (1.9%, 258 counts). Some other frequently used words were “build,” “building” and “buildings” (1.6%), and “palace,” “palaces” (1.5%). The most used words in positive comments coincided with the most used words in overall comments as described above. Figure 2 also reveals that commenters used some common modifiers/adjectives anent the physical features of the hotels in their positive remarks. The frequently referred ones throughout the positive comments were as follows: “historic,” “beautiful” and “historical.” The word “old” was also used markedly (1.1%). Moreover, terms used from 20 to 106 times were as follows: “great,” “luxury,” “modern,” “amazing,” “wonderful,” “renovated,” “nice,” “excellent,” “elegant,” “original,” “lovely,” “best,” “comfortable,” “luxurious,” “perfect,” “stunning,” “charming,” “grand,” “interesting,” “unique,” “fantastic,” “gorgeous” and “spacious.”



Figure 2.
Word cloud derived
from the positive
comments

marked words were “much” (1.3%), “historic” and “historical” (1.1%), “located” and “location” (1.1%), “palace” (1.1%), “dark” (0.9%), “view” and “views” (0.9%) and “disappointed” and “disappointing” (0.7%). Another noticeable word “like” (0.7%) was majorly used in a negative sense according to the tree-map analysis.

Conclusion

As tourists travel to experience destinations, their attractions and, therefore, to gain satisfaction, countries, cities and regions spend considerable effort to improve their touristic images and attractiveness. Historic architecture is one of the most prevalent human-made attractions and image attributes that the tourism industry substantially benefits from. Moreover, this attraction creates a crucial value in augmenting destination competitiveness. Hence, various destinations throughout the world make considerable investments to preserve and maintain such a heritage.

The findings indicate that only 8.8% of the comments were pertinent to the historic features of the sample hotel buildings suggesting that historic hotel buildings are not a mainstay of the hotel industry in terms of attraction but rather a niche for guests who care about history, culture and authenticity. The findings also suggest that historic buildings used as hotels have a specific potential in attracting guests (see also [Perianez-Cristobal et al. \(2020\)](#)), and these buildings are mainly considered positive by guests (see also [Ahmed \(2016\)](#)). Hotel guests are satisfied by the physical – i.e. architectural and atmospheric – features of these buildings. It can be further inferred that historic hotel buildings create very special moments of truth (MOTs) among hotel guests. These MOTs would become ever more unique when underpinned with high-quality service (see also [Juric\(2019\)](#)). The impact of these buildings could be increased when these buildings are introduced effectively with their historical backgrounds, which would create value, such as authenticity, narrative (e.g. literary lodging, see [Chernish \(1998\)](#) and [Juric \(2019\)](#)), or context (being a palace, prison, mansion or having a featured neighborhood). Such a value, that a historical hotel building would create in comparison to the value that its modern counterparts would do, could be a topic of research.

Conclusively, it is beneficial to transform dilapidated historic buildings into hotels with regard to the socio-cultural, economic and environmental perspectives. Turning a heritage building into a hotel will benefit the most in terms of economy, tourism, heritage and that support the sustainable system, as [Nuramin et al. \(2020\)](#) suggest. However, one conspicuous implication to note is that conservation plays an important role in attracting and satisfying hotel guests. Conversational implementation should be challenging and should seek both keeping character and authenticity and availing modern-day features, particularly the tech-related ones. Authorities and bodies related to the architectural conversation should strictly consider the histories and narratives of buildings to be converted to lodging facilities throughout the conservation process and be able to preserve the “spirits” of such buildings and avail them to viewers in a sense that one would feel “true” authenticity rather than a “staged” one. Further, they should conduct conservation to also meet hotel guests’ expectations with regard to corporeal attributes, such as those found in box hotels.

Limitations and future research

This research has specifically focused on the potential of historic hotel buildings as guest attractions by reviewing large numbers of hotel guest comments that were obtained from one of the most prominent travel websites. The research was majorly based on the qualitative method. Future research could seek further to understand the role of historic

hotel buildings in creating tourist demand with qualitative and quantitative methods. Aside from that, it is still a major problem for many countries, particularly the developing ones to find practical solutions to protect and maintain the historic architecture and cultural heritage. Benefitting responsibly from cultural heritage and preserving it for future generations' use is one of the main research problems.

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