Is it Too Much for Dark Tourism as an Alternative Tourism Destination in Malaysia: The Case of Wang Kelian, Perlis

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide a preliminary evaluation of the potential of Wang Kelian Perlis as an alternative tourism destination for dark tourism with the connection of cultural heritage preservation. The methodology applied in this research paper is qualitative and uses a semi-structured interview with 8 (8) key respondents identified to provide in-depth information on the subject matter. The data is analyzed according to themes by using ATLAS.TI software. The study's findings indicate a growing interest in dark tourism in Malaysia. The study also found that industry stakeholders generally support the development of dark tourism, seeing it as a potential source of revenue and a way to attract new visitors to the country. However, the study also revealed challenges associated with the development of dark tourism in Malaysia. Some stakeholders expressed concern about the negative image that dark tourism could project and the potential impact on the country's reputation. In addition, some stakeholders were concerned about the industry's lack of proper regulation and management, which could lead to the exploitation and commercialization of the tragedy. This paper provides valuable insight into the motivations and experiences of visitors to Wang Kelian Perlis. This could help tourism operators to understand their customers better and tailor their services to meet their needs. This paper also highlights the cultural and historical significance of Wang Kelian Perlis. This could help promote the site as an important tourism destination and attract more visitors.

1. Introduction

Dark tourism refers to visiting places associated with death, tragedy or human suffering to have an educational and emotional experience. This type of tourism has attracted considerable attention in recent years due to its controversial nature and impact on preserving historical and cultural heritage. Despite the criticism and ethical concerns, dark tourism continues to grow and develop, attracting millions of visitors each year. The study of dark tourism has emerged as a distinct research area in tourism and heritage, addressing issues such as visitor motivations, impacts on local communities, management and marketing of dark tourism sites, and related ethical considerations. Research in this area aims to understand better the complex relationships between tourists, host communities, and dark tourism sites. The scope of the literature on dark tourism has expanded over the past decade. This work continues to provide a variety of perspectives on the subject. Research on dark tourism focuses on the Western mindset prevalent in countries such as Australia, the United States, and Western Europe. It also extends the scope of the study to Asia. However, it has been argued that the Western framework used in dark tourism studies is only transferable to some countries. Instead, academics/researchers should explore new ways to address the issue. For a diverse multi-racial country such as Malaysia, dark tourism is a questionable option for tourism destinations partly because of its sensitivity. Malaysia is a country that is sensitive to its historical and cultural heritage. The development of dark tourism should not harm these sites. Moreover, with limited awareness and understanding of dark tourism, there may be little awareness and knowledge among the

public and the tourism industry, making promoting and developing this type of tourism challenging. This study examines the benefits of dark tourism for Malaysia as an alternative to mass tourism in the social and economic vein.

2. Literature Review

Dark tourism, also called thanatourism, is a form of tourism that involves visiting places associated with death, tragedy, or suffering. The term "dark tourism" was first used by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in 1996 to describe the growing interest in visiting sites such as Auschwitz, Ground Zero, and the Killing Fields. Dark tourism has existed in practice, if not in name, throughout history (Wright, 2014). According to Bissell (2009), dark tourism has had several aliases such as morbid tourism (Bloom, 2000), black spots (Rojek, 1997) and atrocity tourism (Arshad, & Khan, 2022; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005). Early examples of dark tourism attractions or events may be traced back to Roman gladiatorial games, religious pilgrimages, or visits to see public executions in medieval times (Wright, 2014: Boorstin, 1964). According to Ramlee, Hussin and Hashim (2018), literature has acknowledged the complicated nature of dark tourism and the multilayered destinations labelled as dark destinations despite the challenge of identifying the dark tourist. In addition, there are certainly more well-known and established dark sites in western nations than in Asian nations, as proof that there are more studies undertaken in the western regions with a western perspective despite the rise in contributions to this field (Light, 2017). Since then, "dark tourism" has become a popular and controversial phenomenon with positive and negative impacts on society and the economy. This literature review explores the effects of dark tourism on society and the economy by examining existing research on the topic.
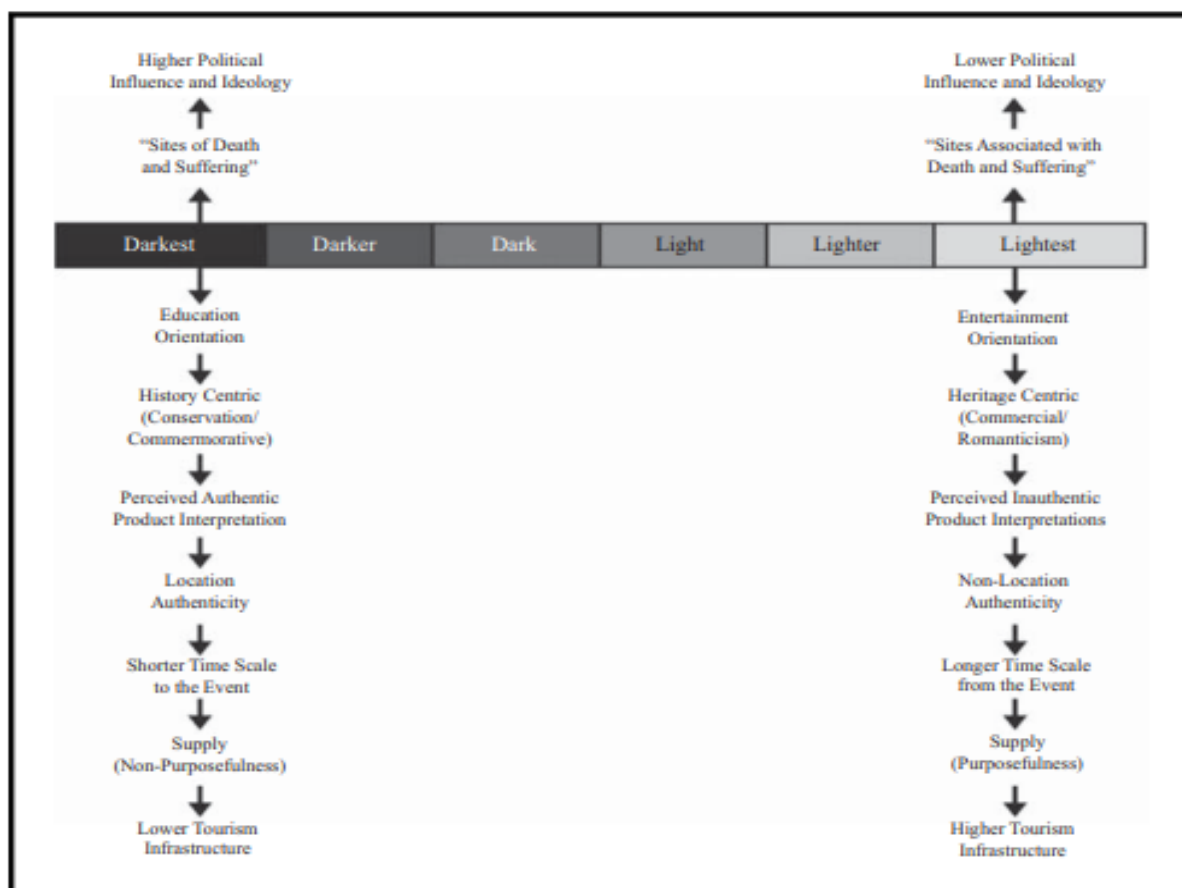

Figure 1: Dark tourism Spectrum Stone, (2006)

Dark tourism sites are one of the current niche markets for Malaysian tourist products. The Malaysian government has marketed its dark tourism industry as one of its possible revenue streams (Abbasi et al., 2013). According to Light (2017), the increasing number of tourists travelling to destinations related to death, suffering

and atrocities contributes to dark tourism development as a niche tourism market and an emerging academic discourse. This is due to the increased interest and focus on the effect of media and extensive social media platforms due to constantly changing travel trends (Tan & Lim, 2018). Malaysia has several dark tourism destinations, but they need to be more well-known worldwide and able to draw in tourists from other countries (Zahari et al., 2016; Braithwaite & Lee, 2006). According to Zahari et al. (2016), the magnificent Kellie's Castle in Perak, which was intended to be a home away from home for Scottish Planters in 1915, the Jerejak Island in Penang, which served as a prison until 1960, and the Bidong Island in Terengganu, which served as a refugee camp in 1978 are a few examples of dark tourism destination in Malaysia. He also stated that other examples include the Penang War Museum, where foreign prisoners were tortured, and the Jerejak Island in Penang, which served as a prison until 1960.

Impact of Dark Tourism on Society
Dark tourism has a significant impact on society, both positive and negative. On the positive side, dark tourism can raise awareness and educate people about critical historical events and human rights violations. For example, a visit to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam can inform people about the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews during World War II. Similarly, a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park can raise awareness about the devastating effects of nuclear weapons on people's lives. In addition, black tourism can also contribute to the preservation and restoration of historic sites and monuments. Revenue from black tourism can be used to preserve and maintain areas that are in danger of destruction or oblivion. For example, revenue from the Colosseum in Rome, a popular site for dark tourism, is used to preserve the monument and the surrounding area (Genov, 2008).

On the other hand, dark tourism can be seen as disrespectful and insensitive to the victims of tragedy and suffering. For example, visiting a site where a recent terrorist attack or natural disaster has occurred can be seen as exploiting victims and their families for profit. In addition, dark tourism can also lead to the commercialisation of tragedy, where the suffering of others is reduced to a marketable product. This can lead to a lack of empathy and sensitivity towards the victims and their families. In addition, dark tourism can also have psychological and emotional effects on visitors (Lee, 1991). Visiting places associated with death and suffering can be emotionally challenging and traumatic, especially for those who have experienced similar events in their own lives. Some researchers believe that gloom tourism can lead to "emotional voyeurism," in which visitors attempt to experience the emotions of others without fully understanding the complexity of the events they are witnessing.

Impact of Dark Tourism on the Economy
Dark tourism can also significantly impact the economy, both positively and negatively. On the positive side, dark tourism can create revenue and employment opportunities for local communities. Visitors to dark tourism sites often spend money on lodging, transportation, food, and souvenirs, boosting the local economy and creating jobs. In addition, dark tourism can also attract international visitors, which can help grow the tourism industry and the overall economy. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland attracts more than 2 million visitors annually and generates millions of dollars in revenue. The site employs hundreds of people, and the revenue is used to maintain and improve the site and for educational programs and research on the Holocaust (Logeiswary, 2016). On the negative side, dark tourism can also harm the local community and the environment. The influx of visitors to dark tourism sites can strain local resources and infrastructure, leading to overcrowding, pollution, and environmental degradation. In addition, the commercialisation of dark tourism can lead to a loss of authenticity and cultural identity as local communities are forced to meet the demands of tourists. Furthermore, the economic benefits of dark tourism are often unevenly distributed, with the majority of revenue going to large corporations and international tour operators. Local communities may need more revenue from dark tourism, leading to economic inequality and marginalisation (Biran & Hyde, 2013).

The historical context of dark tourism in Malaysia

Malaysia has a complex and diverse history in which various events and eras are associated with death and tragedy. During World War II, the Japanese occupied the country, one of the most significant events in Malaysia's history associated with death and suffering. Many war memorials and sites related to Japanese work have become popular dark tourist sites in Malaysia, such as the Bukit Batu Pahat War Memorial and the Tugu Negara, Malaysia's national monument. In addition, Malaysia has also experienced several natural disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that devastated several coastal areas of Malaysia. The tsunami and its aftermath have become a popular dark tourism destination where visitors see the destruction and pay their respects to the victims. In addition, several former prisons and execution sites in Malaysia have become popular dark tourism sites. The most famous of these is Pudu Prison in Kuala Lumpur, which served as a prison for political prisoners during the British colonial period (Bloom, 2000). The prison was also used to execute prisoners. Today, visitors can visit the site and learn more about Malaysia's political history (Banji, 2015).

Impact of Dark Tourism in Malaysia

Dark tourism in Malaysia has a significant impact on the local economy and society, both positive and negative. On the positive side, dark tourism has created new business opportunities and generated revenue for local communities (European Commission, 1998). Visitors to dark tourism sites often spend money on accommodation, transportation, and souvenirs, contributing to the growth of the tourism industry and the local economy. In addition, black tourism in Malaysia has raised awareness and educated visitors about critical historical events and human rights violations. For example, visiting Tugu Negara and other war memorials can inform people about Malaysian soldiers' sacrifices during the Japanese occupation and other conflicts. On the other hand, dark tourism in Malaysia can also be seen as disrespectful and insensitive to the victims of tragedy and suffering. For example, visiting sites associated with the Japanese occupation can be seen as exploiting victims and their families for profit.

Furthermore, the commercialisation of dark tourism can lead to a loss of authenticity and cultural identity as local communities are forced to meet the demands of tourists. In addition, black tourism in Malaysia can also have psychological and emotional impacts on visitors. Visiting sites associated with death and suffering can be emotionally challenging and traumatic, especially for those who have experienced similar events in their own lives (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005).

3. Research Area

Research was conducted in Wang Kelian, Perlis, located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia and covers an 821 km^2. It borders Thailand and the Malaysian provinces of Songkhla and Satun. In 2010, the state had a total population of 245,636, making it the fourth largest state in the country, with a population density of 276.5 people per kilometer2. The capital of the Malaysian state of Perlis is Kangar, while the royal capital is Arau. The city of Padang Besar is located on the Malaysian-Thai border. The state's main port is Kuala Lumpur, from which ferries operate to the famous island of Langkawi. The state's economy is heavily dominated by agriculture, which accounts for 80.5% of land use. The history of Perlis State dates back to 1800. It was initially part of the Kingdom of Kedah. In 1942, it was separated from Kedah and became a Thai vassal state under the rule of the Kingdom of Siam, Bangkok. During this period, it was called "Palit". In 1909, with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, suzerainty over Thailand passed to Great Britain. However, this was returned to Thailand after World War II to reward Siam's alliance with Japan. Initially, the country was part of the British Empire. After joining the Malay Union, it became independent in 1957.
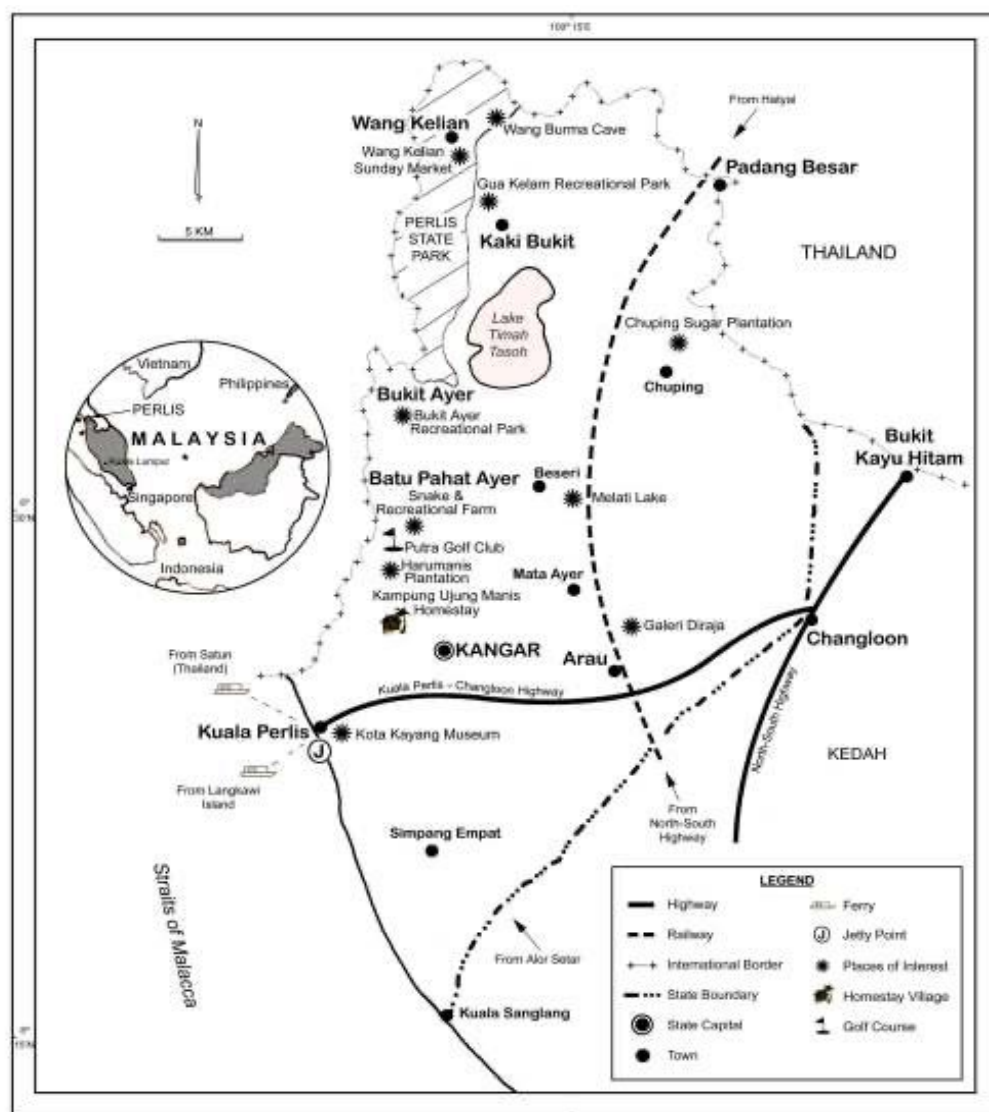
Figure 2. Location and tourism resources in Perlis

In 2015, the remains of over a hundred trafficking victims were found in a mass grave in Malaysia. Most of the victims were from Bangladesh and Myanmar. The incident shed light on the problem of human exploitation in the region. More than a hundred people were arrested in the course of the investigation. In 2015, mass graves were discovered in Wang Kelian, Perlis. It turned out that many of the victims were from Bangladesh and Myanmar and were victims of human trafficking. The victims had been smuggled into Malaysia and exploited for sexual and labour exploitation. The discovery of the mass graves in Malaysia led to widespread condemnation and highlighted the problem of human trafficking. The country's government and international organisations launched investigations to discover what had happened, prevent similar cases, and improve anti-trafficking efforts. The Wang Kelian case has highlighted the need for further steps in the fight against human trafficking. This can be done by introducing effective measures and involving civil society. It is also essential for the international community to work together to prevent human trafficking.

In April 2014, the Malaysian government stopped the free flow of people from Thailand who wanted to come to Malaysia. Human smugglers were reportedly exploiting them. To prevent unauthorised visitors from entering Malaysia, the border crossing is only accessible from a distance of one kilometre. The government's strict enforcement of border crossing procedures in 2015 decreased the number of people entering the country.

The village was once a popular destination for tourists and locals due to the large market on both sides of the border between Thailand, and Malaysia is now a ghost town. However, Wang Kelian has the potential to be developed as one of the dark tourism sites.

4. Methodology

This study will collect data by interviewing the local community and stakeholders' perspectives towards developing dark tourism at Wang Kelian in Perlis. Additional data will also be collected from non-participants. Purposive sampling will be used in selecting participants for the study. Eight key respondents will be chosen, and data analysis will be conducted using a thematic approach. The respondents are the head of the local community (1), the director of Forestry (1), administration officers (2), heritage officers (1), shop owners (2), and tourist guides (1). The collected information will be categorised and analysed to identify themes and patterns. The results of the study will be examined and validated through several interviews. Data will also be collected from non-participants. Ethical considerations of the study will ensure that all participants are informed of the procedures and conditions of the study. They will also be able to withdraw from the study at any time. ATLAS.TI is used to analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews. There are six steps in retrieving and analysing the data as below:

a. Import data into ATLAS.TI: After conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher typically transcribes the recordings into a text format. These text files can then be imported into ATLAS.TI for analysis.

b. Create a codebook: before beginning the coding process, you should create a codebook. A codebook describes the codes and categories used during the analysis. The codebook can be made based on the research questions and themes from the semi-structured interviews.

c. Coding: once the codebook is created, the researcher can begin coding the text in ATLAS.TI, coding means assigning a label to a particular text segment. For example, if a participant describes a specific experience, the researcher can give a code representing that experience, such as "scared" or "unpleasant". The software allows the researcher to set multiple codes to a single text segment.

d. Writing memos: The researcher can begin writing messages after coding the data. Memos describe the researcher's experience and interpretations of the data. These notes can identify patterns and themes that emerge during the analysis.

e. Analysis: After the data is coded and the memos are written, the researcher can begin analysing the data. ATLAS.TI allows the researcher to view the coded data by code, by document, or by a combination of both. The software allows the researcher to visually represent the data, such as charts or word clouds.

f. Reporting: Finally, the researcher can record the analysis results in writing. The report should summarise critical findings, including any patterns or themes that emerged from the data. The information should also include quotes from participants that illustrate the results. ATLAS.TI can be used to create pieces that have visualisations and quotes from the data.

5. Results and Discussion

Social Perspectives

Cultural Identity and Preservation

Wang Kelian may have cultural significance to the local community, and the influx of tourists may change how the community views and interacts with the site. This theme explores how dark tourism can affect the local culture and history of Wang Kelian. It raises the question of preserving local culture while allowing tourism. For example, what measures can be taken to ensure that tourists understand and respect the local culture and history of the site? How can local people be involved in the tourism industry to ensure that their cultural identity is preserved and promoted? The social perspective of dark tourism in Wang Kelian focuses on the impact of tourism on the local community and its culture. This theme highlights the importance of preserving the cultural identity and history of the place while allowing tourism. The influx of tourists can change how the local

community views and interacts with the site. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that tourists understand and respect the local culture and history of the site.

Community Attitudes and Beliefs

This theme addresses local community attitudes and beliefs toward dark tourism. The influx of tourists can change the community's social fabric, and the theme examines how the community adapts to these changes. The article also discusses how the local community perceives tourists and their impact on the community. For example, how do local people relate to tourists, and how do they perceive their impact on their daily lives? What measures can ensure that the local community benefits from the tourism industry? Community attitudes and beliefs are also essential factors to consider in dark tourism. The opinions and attitudes of the local community towards tourists and their impact on the community can influence the tourism industry. It is essential to involve the local community in the tourism industry to ensure that their cultural identity is preserved and promoted and that they benefit from the tourism industry.

Ethical Concerns

Tourists visit a place that may be associated with a tragedy or disaster, and the theme explores how the local community feels about this type of tourism. The article also examines whether local people know the ethical concerns and how they think about them. For example, what ethical issues arise from dark tourism, and how can they be addressed? What measures can be taken to ensure that tourists understand and respect the tragedy or disaster in the place?

Emotional Impact

This theme concerns how the local community feels about tourists visiting the site of a tragedy or disaster. The site may have emotional significance to the community, and the influx of tourists may affect their emotional well-being. The issue also raises questions about how the local community deals with the emotional impact of the tragedy or disaster and the influx of tourists. For example, what measures can be taken to provide emotional and mental support to the local community? How can the tourism industry work with the local community to ensure that the emotional well-being of the population is a priority?

Economic Perspectives

Economic Benefits

This theme addresses the economic benefits of dark tourism for Wang Kelian. The influx of tourists can contribute to the local economy and create jobs for local people. The topic also explores how tourism contributes to the local economy and benefits the community. For example, what are the economic benefits of dark tourism for Wang Kelian, and how are these benefits distributed to the local community? What measures can be taken to ensure the tourism industry brings long-term economic benefits to the local community?

Tourism Infrastructure

This theme looks at how the tourism infrastructure in Wang Kelian has evolved to accommodate dark tourism. The article examines challenges and opportunities from tourism infrastructure, such as developing new businesses or the environmental impact. For example, what is the current state of tourism infrastructure in Wang Kelian, and how can it be improved to meet the needs of tourists and local people? How can the tourism infrastructure be developed sustainably?

6. **Conclusion**

In summary, the development of dark tourism in Wang Kelian, Perlis, has both social and economic benefits. Dark tourism can help preserve the historical and cultural significance of the border town of Wang Kelian and allow visitors to learn about the region's past. In addition, dark tourism can contribute to the local economy by creating jobs and increasing revenue through visitor spending. From a social perspective, the development of dark tourism can help raise awareness of human rights issues related to migrant smuggling in Wang Kelian. It can also allow visitors to reflect on the ethical implications of such activities and their impact on the local

community. Dark tourism can help foster a more empathetic and understanding society by educating visitors about these issues. In addition, dark tourism can help create a sense of community and shared history among locals. By preserving the historical significance of Wang Kelian and sharing it with visitors, the local community can develop a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. This can help strengthen social ties and promote community cohesion and unity.

From an economic perspective, the development of dark tourism can significantly boost the local economy. Attracting visitors to the region can create jobs for locals and generate revenue through visitor spending on lodging, food, transportation, and other services. This can help diversify the local economy and provide a sustainable source of income for the community. In summary, the development of dark tourism in Wang Kelian, Perlis, has the potential to bring significant social and economic benefits to the region. However, it is essential to ensure that development occurs responsibly and sustainably that respects the local community and its cultural heritage. When economic benefits are balanced with social and environmental considerations, dark tourism can be a valuable tool to promote economic growth and artistic preservation.

Acknowledgement

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