JOURNAL OF
CONTEMPORARY
TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
KSTCL IIUM

Community Willingness and Readiness for Cultural Heritage Tourism: The Case of Kampung Chitty, Malacca Historic City, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage tourism (CHT) engages communities by preserving and showcasing traditions, identities, and practices. Cultural heritage tourism involves traveling to explore places, artifacts, and activities that reflect a region's historical narratives and identity. It encourages local communities to engage by sharing their heritage and traditions. However, successful cultural heritage tourism depends on the willingness and readiness of the local community to participate. Despite its significance in sustainable tourism planning and heritage preservation, research on local community participation remains limited. This study investigates the willingness, readiness, and involvement of Kampung Chitty residents in Malacca's heritage tourism. Using a qualitative approach, five semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore community perceptions. Findings reveal that willingness is shaped by economic benefits, cultural attachment, sustainability awareness, and social networks, while readiness depends on knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment. Despite strong motivation and cultural pride, barriers such as limited infrastructure, generational disengagement, and insufficient training hinder full participation. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the dual role of economic incentives and cultural authenticity in motivating participation, offering practical insights for policymakers and tourism planners to foster inclusive and sustainable cultural heritage tourism.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Tourism; Community Participation; Kampung Chitty Readiness; Willingness

Article Classification: Case Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) has emerged as a vital dimension of the global tourism industry, offering travelers opportunities to engage with the tangible and intangible cultural elements of destinations. Defined as travel undertaken to explore places, artifacts, and activities that authentically reflect a community's historical narratives and cultural identity, CHT not only preserves heritage but also stimulates socio-economic development and intercultural understanding (Gordon, 2022; Mazi & Choy, 2021). The World Tourism Organization has projected that cultural tourism will remain among the fastest-growing segments of the tourism sector; yet, balancing its economic potential with sustainable cultural preservation remains a persistent challenge (Ismail et al., 2014). When well-managed, CHT revitalizes traditions, restores heritage sites, and provides income opportunities. However, when neglected, it risks cultural commodification and the erosion of authenticity (Mahboob et al., 2022).

Within this global context, Malaysia has emerged as a notable cultural heritage destination, where the integration of tourism development and heritage preservation presents both opportunities and challenges. Malaysia has positioned itself as a cultural heritage hub within Southeast Asia, with Malacca recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. The state is historically significant for its strategic role as a maritime trading port for over 500 years, facilitating exchanges among Malay, Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, and British cultures. Malacca's diverse heritage is showcased through iconic landmarks such as the Stadthuys, St. Paul's Church, and Christ Church, alongside living traditions that remain embedded in local communities (Ismail et al., 2018). Within this landscape lies *Kampung Chitty*, a small but culturally distinctive village, home to the Chitty community, descendants of Indian traders intermarried with local Malays, Chinese, and Javanese during the Malacca Sultanate (Moorthy, 2021). Officially recognized as a historic village in 2002, Kampung Chitty preserves a unique blend of traditions, combining Hindu religious practices with Malay language, cuisine, and customs. Yet, like many small cultural enclaves, it faces existential challenges, including modernization, outmigration of youth, and weakening intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge (Fikri et al., 2021).

The sustainability of CHT relies heavily on the active participation of local communities, whose involvement ensures that tourism initiatives align with cultural authenticity and community aspirations (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016; Arumugam et al., 2023). Local communities not only act as custodians of heritage but also play a pivotal role in shaping tourist experiences. However, despite the significance of their role, small heritage communities like Kampung Chitty often face marginalization in tourism planning compared to larger or more commercialized heritage sites (Ismail et al., 2018). Limited resources, lack of systematic documentation, insufficient training, and generational disengagement restrict their ability to leverage tourism for cultural and economic sustainability (Khadijah et al., 2024).

Although several studies have examined CHT in Malaysia and beyond, limited attention has been given to understanding the *willingness* and *readiness* of small, marginalized heritage communities to participate in tourism development (Sayuti, 2023;

Hanifah et al., 2024). This gap is critical because willingness reflects a community's motivation to engage in tourism initiatives, while readiness determines their capacity, in terms of knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment, to effectively participate (Edwards et al., 2000). Without willingness, even resource-rich communities may resist tourism activities; conversely, without readiness, motivated communities may fail to sustain engagement. Understanding both dimensions is therefore essential for fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism.

To address this gap, this study investigates the case of Kampung Chitty in Malacca. Specifically, it explores (1) the current levels of community involvement in CHT, (2) the factors influencing their willingness to participate, and (3) the extent of their readiness in terms of skills, knowledge, resources, and commitment. By focusing on Kampung Chitty, this research contributes not only to Malaysian tourism studies but also to broader discussions on community-based heritage tourism in small, hybrid cultural communities. The findings aim to guide policymakers, NGOs, and tourism planners in designing culturally sensitive and inclusive strategies that preserve heritage while empowering local communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Heritage Tourism

CHT is widely acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing segments of global tourism, contributing significantly to both cultural preservation and socio-economic development (Gordon, 2022, Wallerstein, 2022). It encompasses both tangible heritage, such as monuments, architecture, and landscapes, and intangible heritage, including traditions, rituals, crafts, and oral histories (UNESCO, 2003; Zarandona, 2015). Importantly, CHT functions as a bridge between past and present, allowing communities to maintain cultural continuity while adapting to modern tourism demands (Vos, 2018).

International examples illustrate the transformative potential of CHT. In China, the designation of the Fujian *tulou* as a World Heritage Site revitalized local economies but also highlighted the need to balance conservation with commercialization pressures (Liu et al., 2022). Similarly, projects in Algeria's Dellys and Vietnam's Tuyên Quang demonstrated that heritage-based tourism can stimulate community development, though challenges remain in coordination and community empowerment (Necissa & Rayane, 2024; Van, 2024). While the Fujian tulou shows successful community engagement, experiences in Dellys indicate that without inclusive governance, benefits may be unevenly distributed, emphasizing the importance of participatory approaches in CHT. Within Malaysia, CHT initiatives such as the Langkawi charcoal kilns and traditional kite-making (*Wau Bulan*) illustrate how local culture can be preserved while generating tourism value (Lim et al., 2023; Kasinathan, 2024).

Nevertheless, concerns of cultural commodification and loss of authenticity persist when tourism is driven by top-down policies without community participation (Mahboob et al., 2022). Authenticity has emerged as a key determinant of visitor satisfaction and revisit intention, making it essential that cultural tourism strategies prioritize local voices and values (Uslu et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). These examples demonstrate how CHT

intersects with key theoretical concepts of authenticity, community participation, and heritage conservation. For small heritage communities such as Kampung Chitty, this underscores the need for participatory approaches that safeguard unique traditions while accommodating tourism development.

2.2 Community Participation

Community participation is a cornerstone of sustainable CHT because it ensures that local perspectives, aspirations, and cultural priorities shape tourism development (Migliaro, 2023; Rasmussen, 2023). Participation empowers communities to act not merely as service providers but as decision-makers and custodians of their heritage. Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* remains an influential framework, categorizing participation from manipulative and tokenistic involvement to genuine citizen power. At the lowest level, participation may be symbolic, with little influence on decision-making. In the middle tier, residents can express opinions but lack authority to influence outcomes, akin to induced participation in Tosun's (2006) model. At the highest level, communities hold genuine power to initiate, plan, and manage tourism projects, aligning with spontaneous participation and self-mobilisation frameworks. Evidence from various contexts demonstrates the benefits of meaningful participation. For example, integrating indigenous knowledge into tourism projects in Vietnam has improved cultural preservation and strengthened community ownership (Nam & Thanh, 2024). Similarly, rehabilitation of the Sawentar Temple in Indonesia highlighted how grassroots participation fosters collective identity (Aji & Wirasanti, 2024). Conversely, limited digital access in West Java underscores structural barriers that restrict meaningful engagement (Khadijah et al., 2024).

Meaningful participation is not only about consultation but also about decision-making power. When communities have greater control, they are more likely to support tourism initiatives and contribute to their sustainability (Basile-Mario et al., 2021). In Kampung Chitty, however, participation has often been limited to operational roles such as preparing food or hosting visitors, with minimal involvement in higher-level planning. This imbalance raises concerns of marginalization, which could undermine long-term sustainability if not addressed (Mubita et al., 2017).

2.3 Willingness to Participate

Willingness reflects the motivational dimension of community engagement in Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT), encompassing the readiness, motivation, and enthusiasm of local communities to participate in heritage preservation and tourism activities. Multiple studies indicate that willingness is shaped by economic, cultural, social, and environmental factors (Chauhan, 2022; Eslami et al., 2019), but the relative influence of these factors varies across contexts.

Economic benefits remain a powerful incentive, as tourism generates employment opportunities, diversifies income sources, and enhances resilience (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020). Opportunities for small business ventures, handicraft sales, or local guiding services provide tangible income and a sense of ownership over tourism outcomes,

but these temporary gains may not sustain engagement without complementary cultural and social incentives.

Community attachment is equally critical, as strong emotional ties to place motivate residents to participate in heritage activities that protect identity and collective memory (Chauhan, 2022; Dragouni et al., 2017). Communities with strong connections to their cultural practices are often more inclined to engage in tourism initiatives that safeguard local heritage, whereas those facing rapid socio-economic changes may prioritize immediate financial gains.

Cultural and social values further reinforce willingness when communities perceive tourism as a mechanism to safeguard traditions, with alignment between tourism development and cultural integrity ensuring acceptance and pride (Eslami et al., 2019). Sustainability awareness is a growing driver of participation, particularly among younger generations conscious of environmental impacts. Residents who perceive tourism as contributing to ecological and cultural sustainability are more likely to participate actively in planning and management (Huong et al., 2021).

Social networks and norms enhance participation by fostering collective action, trust, and intergenerational support (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020). The influence of social ties is often context-dependent; in close-knit communities, peer influence, family expectations, and community leaders can amplify willingness, whereas in more fragmented settings, networks may be weaker, limiting participation.

For Kampung Chitty, willingness is intricately tied not only to financial incentives but also to cultural pride in maintaining hybrid traditions, blending Chitty heritage with broader Malaysian cultural influences. This local context underscores that policy approaches must go beyond economic benefits to embrace identity-driven motivations, integrating social cohesion, cultural preservation, and sustainable practices.

2.4 Readiness to Participate

While willingness indicates motivation, readiness refers to the capacity to translate motivation into action. The *Community Readiness Model* (CRM) conceptualizes readiness as comprising knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment (Edwards et al., 2000). Ayu (2014) further emphasizes the importance of procedural knowledge, marketing skills, and resource mobilization in determining preparedness for tourism development. Knowledge enables communities to understand visitor behavior and tourism markets, skills facilitate management and implementation, and resources, both natural and built, provide the foundation for activities. Commitment, reflected in collective action and long-term planning, sustains initiatives over time.

Case studies across the globe highlight the varied manifestations of readiness depending on local capacities and contexts. In Northern Thailand, indigenous knowledge integration enhanced ecotourism management (Promburom et al., 2009) whereas in Ethiopia, resource management proved vital for leveraging cultural assets (Tadesse, 2022). Conversely, in Tanzania and Oman, deficiencies in infrastructure and training hindered local participation (Sayuti, 2023). Similarly in Indonesia and Vietnam, studies found that while

cultural knowledge was strong, financial and skill-related gaps limited effective participation (Thảo et al., 2024; Kurniati et al., 2024). These contrasts illustrate that cultural knowledge alone does not guarantee readiness; rather, a combination of skills, resources, and institutional support is necessary to convert willingness into tangible outcomes.

For Kampung Chitty, readiness challenges are particularly evident in terms of infrastructure, youth engagement, and capacity-building. While elders possess cultural knowledge and skills in storytelling, rituals, and traditional cooking, younger generations are less engaged due to migration and modernization pressures. This imbalance threatens the continuity of cultural practices unless training and mentorship initiatives are prioritized.
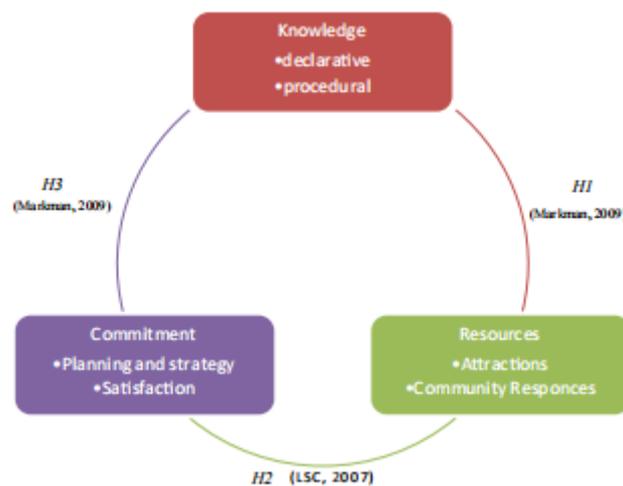

Figure 2.4. Sustainable Tourism Readiness Framework

Source: Ayu, R. (2014)

2.5 Framework of the Study

Drawing from the reviewed literature, this study develops a framework that integrates involvement, willingness, and readiness as interdependent dimensions of community participation in CHT. The framework is situated (refer to Figure 2.5). Involvement is understood through the lenses of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation and Tosun's (2006) typology, capturing the extent to which communities move from tokenistic or consultative roles to active decision-making and project management. Willingness is shaped by a combination of economic, cultural, social, and sustainability-related factors, reflecting both tangible incentives and identity-driven motivations that encourage engagement in heritage preservation and tourism activities (Chauhan, 2022; Dragouni et al., 2017; Eslami et al., 2019; Huong et al., 2021). Readiness, in turn, depends on the availability of resources, knowledge, skills, and collective commitment, determining whether motivated communities can translate interest into effective participation (Ayu, 2014; Edwards et al., 2000).
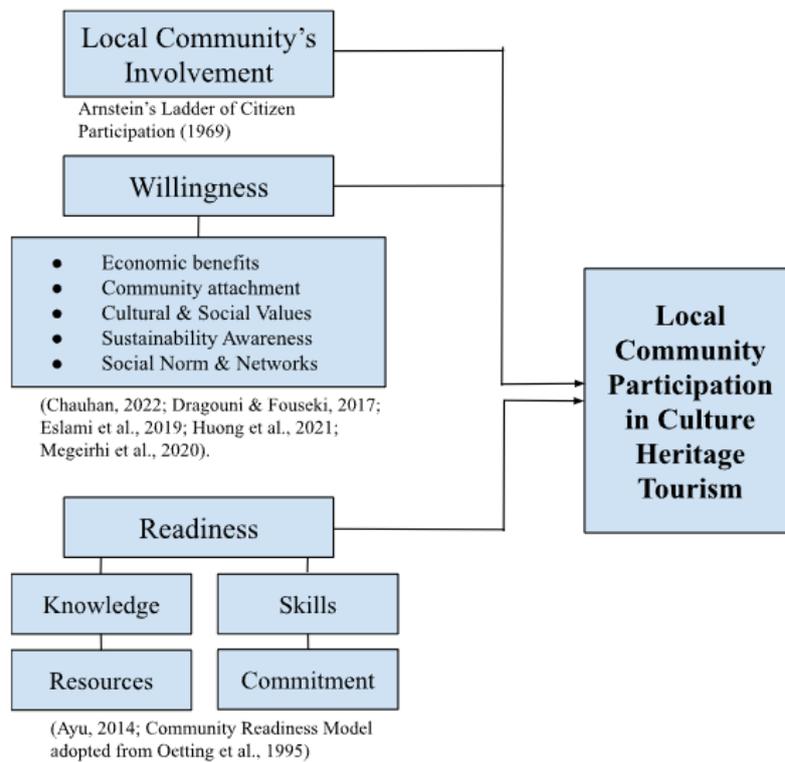
Figure 2.5. Framework of Study

Source: Understanding Local Community's Willingness and Readiness to Participate in Cultural Heritage Tourism in Kampung Chetti, Malacca, World Heritage Sites (2025)

By combining these perspectives, the framework offers a holistic lens for assessing how small heritage communities, such as Kampung Chitty, can sustain cultural tourism. This integrative approach contributes both theoretically, by extending participation models to marginalized communities, and practically, by offering insights for inclusive and sustainable policy design.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is particularly suited for exploring perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences of local communities. Unlike quantitative surveys that emphasize breadth, qualitative approaches allow for in-depth exploration of complex social realities, capturing nuances of cultural practices and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontologically, this study assumes a constructivist perspective, acknowledging that realities are socially constructed through interactions and cultural contexts. Epistemologically, knowledge is co-created between the researcher and participants, emphasizing interpretive understanding rather than objective measurement. Since the objective of this research was to investigate the willingness, readiness, and

involvement of the Kampung Chitty community in cultural heritage tourism (CHT), a qualitative design ensured a contextualized understanding of cultural identity and participation.

Within the qualitative design, a case study approach was employed, focusing on Kampung Chitty as a single bounded unit. A case study facilitates a holistic understanding of phenomena within their real-life context. This approach was appropriate because Kampung Chitty represents a unique cultural heritage setting where willingness, readiness, and involvement in cultural heritage tourism (CHT) are shaped by historical, social, and cultural dynamics. Studying this community as a single case allowed the research to capture the depth and complexity of local experiences, motivations, and challenges.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in *Kampung Chitty*, a small heritage village located in Gajah Berang, Malacca, Malaysia. The community, consisting of approximately 350 residents, is historically significant due to its hybrid cultural identity blending Hindu practices with Malay social customs (Moorthy, 2021). Kampung Chitty was chosen as the study site because of its unique cultural heritage, recognition as a historic village since 2002, and its potential as an underrepresented cultural tourism destination within Malacca's UNESCO World Heritage framework. However, modernization and youth migration have threatened the continuity of traditions, making it an appropriate case study for examining readiness and willingness in CHT.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling approach was employed to identify participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experiences regarding the community's cultural heritage and tourism activities. Five community members were selected to represent different perspectives, including elders, festival organizers, and residents with tourism-related experiences. While the sample size may appear small, it is consistent with qualitative research principles, which prioritize *depth of insights* over *breadth of coverage* (Guest et al., 2006). The selected participants were able to provide *rich, contextual narratives* on the community's involvement in cultural practices and tourism-related activities.

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were: (i) they must be residents of Kampung Chitty, (ii) have active involvement or familiarity with cultural heritage practices, and (iii) be willing to share experiences related to tourism and community activities. Initial contacts were made with the assistance of community leaders, after which referrals were used to identify additional participants to ensure diverse perspectives. Data saturation was reached by the fifth interview, as no new themes emerged during the final sessions (Guest et al., 2006).

Table 1 summarizes the demographic background and community roles of the five respondents. This reflects the generational and functional diversity of the sample, ensuring that perspectives were captured from both cultural custodians and community representatives involved in tourism-related activities.

Table 1. Demographic background and community roles

No. of Respondents	Age	Gender	Occupation
R1	75	Male	Retiree
R2	55	Male	Retiree
R3	57	Male	Malacca Indian Association's committee members
R4	79	Male	Head Villager
R5	48	Male	Sanctuary's gatekeeper

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a balance between structured questions and open-ended responses. This approach encouraged participants to share detailed narratives while enabling the researcher to probe for further insights when necessary (Kallio et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' homes or community gathering spaces, depending on their convenience. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. To ensure ethical integrity, respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality.

The interview guide focused on three thematic areas aligned with the research objectives: (1) Current involvement in cultural heritage activities, (2) Willingness to participate in cultural heritage tourism (e.g., perceived benefits, cultural and social motivations, sustainability awareness), and (3) Readiness to participate, including knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely utilized approach in qualitative research for identifying and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process followed several iterative stages, beginning with familiarization, where the transcripts were read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. This was followed by initial coding, in which relevant excerpts related to willingness, readiness, and involvement were identified. Subsequently, the coded data were organized into broader categories or themes, such as economic benefits, community attachment, cultural preservation, skills, and resources. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and alignment with the research objectives. Finally, the findings were interpreted and contextualized within the theoretical framework and existing literature to provide meaningful insights into the study's focus. Triangulation was achieved by collecting perspectives from diverse participants, including elders, festival organizers, and residents with tourism experience, ensuring insights were not limited to a single viewpoint. Iterative comparison of emerging themes with prior studies strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. By combining

different participant perspectives and cross-referencing literature, the study enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought in line with the research protocols of higher learning institutions. Participants were briefed about the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained before each interview. Anonymity was ensured by coding participants as Respondent 1 through Respondent 5, and data were handled confidentially throughout the research process.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents findings from semi-structured interviews with five residents of Kampung Chitty residents. Thematic analysis revealed three main dimensions of community participation in cultural heritage tourism (CHT): (1) current involvement, (2) willingness to participate, and (3) readiness to participate. Each dimension is discussed below, illustrated with participants' verbatim quotes to reflect lived experiences.

4.1 Current Community Involvement

The degree of involvement in CHT among Kampung Chitty residents varies from active engagement to occasional participation. Four out of five respondents reported regular involvement in cultural events such as *Ponggal*, exhibitions, and heritage festivals, performing roles that include cooking traditional foods, guiding visitors, and performing ceremonial duties. For example, one participant shared:

"I once cooked for an event at the red building, involving the Chitty culture in the ceremony. The government or my YB friends will call me to promote Kampung Chitty" (Respondent 2).

Another highlighted his role as a cultural guide:

"… I often take tourists to visit the area and promote Chitty culture through festivals like Ponggal" (Respondent 4).

However, not all residents are equally active. One respondent admitted to only occasional involvement in national events:

"I rarely get involved. Sometimes I take part in parades like the National Day Parade" (Respondent 1).

These findings indicate that while cultural pride remains strong among elders, broader community participation is inconsistent, particularly among younger generations, is less consistent. This indicates potential for more inclusive strategies to strengthen overall participation in heritage activities.

4.2 Factors Influencing Willingness to Participate

The interviews highlighted several interrelated factors influencing the willingness of Kampung Chitty residents to engage in CHT.

Economic Benefits

Tourism is seen as a potential source of supplementary income, with residents emphasizing opportunities for small businesses during festivals. As one respondent explained:

"In 2 days of the program, they distributed between RM1,000 to RM2,000… If there are a lot of tourists, the residents here can sell traditional food, medicine, or be a tour guide" (Respondent 3).

Concerns about rising costs due to increased tourism were also noted: *"Sometimes the price of goods goes up because there are many tourists come."*

These insights suggest that while economic incentives encourage engagement, the impact is situational and may require careful planning to sustain participation.

Community Attachment

Residents expressed generational ties to Kampung Chitty, reinforcing their desire to preserve cultural identity. One respondent shared:

"I was born in this house. My grandmother came here and married a local. I am 3rd generation. Very attached, I was born and raised here… I still practice all that" (Respondent 5).

Such intergenerational connections foster a sense of stewardship, motivating participation beyond material gains.

Cultural and Social Values

Authenticity in cultural practices was emphasized as a non-negotiable aspect of heritage tourism. Traditional cuisine was repeatedly highlighted:

"If tourists come like my friend from Singapore… he will call me and say 'I want to ask uncle to cook Chitty cultural food.' No need to change. We can adjust it a little bit, but the recipe has to stay original" (Respondent 2).

This underscores the role of cultural authenticity in maintaining both community pride and visitor satisfaction.

Sustainability Awareness

Some respondents expressed concerns about tourism's impact on traditions and the environment. One commented:

"Tourism is good, but tourists should not pollute the village or disturb our customs" (Respondent 3).

Another stressed the importance of intergenerational transmission:
"During Ponggal, the community teaches the younger generation to cook milk rice using firewood." (Respondent 4)

This reflects growing awareness of eco-cultural sustainability as part of heritage preservation.

Social Networks and Norms
Participation was often reinforced by family and community traditions passed down through generations. For example:
"…when my grandmother makes it, my mother will help. Then when my mother makes it, I will help. Now I ask my children to help too" (Respondent 5).

This highlights the collective nature of participation, where social expectations strengthen community involvement.

4.3 Readiness to Participate: Skills, Knowledge, Resources, and Commitment
Readiness reflects the community's capacity to translate motivation into action, encompassing knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment.

Knowledge
Most respondents displayed strong knowledge of cultural traditions and history. One participant noted:
"Our culture remains… We go outside to showcase our culture. Multiple times, people have called me to go to Singapore" (Respondent 2).

However, gaps were acknowledged, with some expressing the need for training programs to expand their knowledge about tourism management.

Skills
Respondents highlighted skills in storytelling, cooking, and communication, all of which are crucial for engaging tourists:
"The skill of telling stories about the history of the village, cooking traditional food… all this is important to attract tourists." (Respondent 4),

Yet, a need for improved communication skills, particularly for interacting with international visitors, was frequently mentioned.

Resources

The community possesses unique cultural assets, including temples, rituals, and cuisine. However, infrastructural gaps were evident:

"…the main road and the temple are already there, but there is still a lack of signs, public toilets, and rest areas for tourists" (Respondent 1).

Limited external support and inadequate facilities were identified as barriers to readiness.

Commitment

Elders demonstrated strong commitment to cultural preservation, often voicing concerns about youth disengagement:

"If we don't keep it, it will disappear… now the new generation all go to college." (Respondent 3)

Nevertheless, efforts are being made to involve youth through hands-on experiences, as illustrated by one respondent:

"We have to involve them from the beginning. When they enjoy, they will continue." (Respondent 5)

4.4 Summary of Findings

Table 2 below indicate the summarizes of the themes, sub-themes, and overall findings on involvement, willingness, and readiness.

Table 2. Summarized Analysis of Findings for Level of Involvement, Willingness, and Readiness

Theme	Subtheme	Overall Findings
Level of Involvement	Participation	• Involvement varies; some are highly engaged, while others participate occasionally, suggesting opportunities for broader participation
Willingness to Participate	Economic Benefits	• Expecting financial benefits such as employment and high income
	Community Attachment	• Had a strong emotional connection with the community • Strong sense of responsibility to support tourism development
	Social and Cultural Value	• Emphasized preserving Chitty's authenticity • Traditional cuisine plays a central role in

		Chitty's CHT activities
		• Minor adjustments are acceptable, but keep the originality
	Sustainability Awareness	• Understanding of the environmental impacts
		• The needs of eco-friendly tourism practices to increase participation
		• Emphasized on young generation's responsibility for cultural continuity
	Social Networks and Norms	• Mostly influenced by family through being passed down from one generation to another generation
Readiness to Participate	Knowledge	• Understand the concept of CHT and be knowledgeable about Chitty's culture
		• Cultural erosion is the main concern
		• Prioritizing preservation of legacy
	Skills	• Expert in practical skills such as traditional cooking, storytelling, and participating in tourism activities
		• The need to improve communication skills to interact with tourists
		• Training program for an in-depth understanding of tourism
	Resources	• Abundance of unique cultural assets
		• Lack of public facilities such as signage, restrooms to entertain tourists
	Commitment	• Showed strong commitment to protecting Chitty's cultural heritage
		• Elder communities are more dedicated compared to younger generations
		• Emphasized motivating youngsters by practical involvement and hands-on experiences

Source: Understanding Local Community's Willingness and Readiness to Participate in Cultural Heritage Tourism in Kampung Chitty, Malacca, World Heritage Sites (2025)

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community to participate in CHT. The findings confirm that economic benefits, cultural pride, and social networks strongly influence willingness, while knowledge, skills,

resources, and commitment determine readiness. Despite strong cultural identity and motivation, challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient training, and youth disengagement remain significant barriers. The following discussion situates these findings within the broader literature, highlighting both convergences and unique contributions.

5.1 Community Involvement

The findings demonstrate varied levels of community involvement, ranging from highly active participation in festivals and rituals to only occasional engagement in national events. This pattern aligns with Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* and Tosun's (2006) participation typology, which emphasizes the spectrum from tokenistic to genuine community involvement. Similar to studies in Morocco's Chefchaouen (Nakkouch, 2024) and Vietnam (Nam & Thanh, 2024), Kampung Chitty residents are often confined to operational roles (e.g., cooking, guiding), while decision-making power in tourism planning remains limited. This highlights a structural imbalance that risks marginalizing small heritage communities if not addressed.

A notable contribution of this study is the emphasis on intergenerational gaps in participation. Elders were actively engaged, but younger residents were less involved due to education and migration. This mirrors findings in Albania (Menkshi, Braholli, Çobani, & Shehu, 2021), where youth disengagement posed threats to cultural continuity. For Kampung Chitty, targeted strategies for youth engagement are essential to sustain both cultural identity and active participation.

5.2 Willingness to Participate

Consistent with global literature, economic benefits emerged as a primary driver of willingness (Chauhan, 2022; Huong et al., 2021). Residents highlighted opportunities for additional income during cultural events, echoing findings from Ethiopia (Tadesse, 2022) and Indonesia (Arizkha et al., 2023), where communities supported CHT primarily due to its potential to enhance livelihoods. However, willingness in Kampung Chitty is not solely economically motivated; it is equally influenced by cultural attachment and the preservation of authentic practices particularly regarding cuisine and rituals. This duality contributes to the literature by showing that economic and cultural motivations can operate simultaneously, rather than exclusively. Cultural authenticity was particularly emphasized by respondents, who insisted on maintaining original recipes and practices even when adapting for tourists. This finding strengthens prior research that identified authenticity as a determinant of visitor satisfaction and community support (Uslu et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Importantly, the emphasis on cuisine as a cultural marker adds a unique dimension to the discussion, aligning with Fikri et al. (2021), who highlighted food heritage as central to the Chitty identity. Thus, willingness in Kampung Chitty cannot be understood solely in economic terms, but must also be contextualized within identity-driven motivations.

Sustainability awareness also influenced willingness, particularly in terms of environmental concerns and intergenerational cultural continuity. Similar to studies in

India (Kaur et al., 2022) and Indonesia (Hidayat et al., 2023), Kampung Chitty residents expressed the importance of eco-friendly practices and teaching youth cultural traditions. This reflects a growing alignment between sustainable development goals and local community aspirations. Social networks and community norms reinforce this engagement by embedding participation in everyday practice, highlighting the role of social reinforcement in sustaining long-term involvement (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020; Ramaano, 2022).

5.3 Readiness to Participate

While willingness was strong, readiness presented notable gaps. Residents demonstrated rich cultural knowledge and practical skills in cooking and storytelling, but acknowledged limitations in communication and tourism management skills. This finding echoes studies in Vietnam (Thảo et al., 2024) and Indonesia (Kurniati et al., 2024), where communities possessed strong cultural resources but lacked technical expertise. Training and capacity-building programs are therefore critical to translate willingness into effective participation.

Infrastructure emerged as another readiness barrier, with respondents pointing to insufficient signage, toilets, and resting facilities for visitors. These challenges parallel findings from Lombok, Indonesia (Sayuti, 2023), and Kenya (Abiero et al., 2017), where inadequate facilities hindered CHT growth. Addressing these gaps requires collaboration between local authorities, NGOs, and the community.

Commitment was strongly evident among elders but weaker among younger generations. This generational divide mirrors findings in Thailand (Promburom et al., 2009) and Albania (Menkshi et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of mentoring and hands-on engagement to sustain cultural continuity. The unique contribution here lies in the hybrid identity of the Chitty community, where intergenerational transmission is not just about preserving rituals but also safeguarding a cultural synthesis of Hindu, Malay, and Chinese influences (Moorthy, 2021).

5.4 Novel Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to the existing literature on cultural heritage tourism (CHT) in several important ways. First, it reveals the economic–cultural duality within small heritage communities, showing that willingness to participate is influenced not only by financial incentives but also by the pursuit of cultural authenticity, especially in the preservation of food heritage. Second, it underscores the generational dynamics at play, where elders act as cultural custodians while younger generations exhibit a noticeable disengagement from heritage-related activities. Third, by examining the Chitty community, the study highlights the complexities of hybrid cultural identity, illustrating how such hybridity can present both opportunities for cultural promotion and vulnerabilities in maintaining authenticity. Finally, the research identifies readiness constraints, demonstrating that cultural richness alone does not ensure readiness for tourism development, as infrastructural limitations and skill deficiencies continue to pose significant challenges.

5.5 Policy and Practical Implications

The findings of this study present several important implications for tourism stakeholders and policymakers. First, capacity-building through targeted training programs in communication, tourism management, and digital marketing can significantly enhance community readiness and participation. Second, infrastructure development should be prioritized, with investments directed toward improving visitor-friendly facilities such as signage, restrooms, and resting areas to create a more welcoming environment for tourists. Third, youth engagement initiatives, such as storytelling sessions, culinary workshops, and heritage education, can encourage younger generations to take an active role in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. Fourth, inclusive planning is vital, ensuring that community members are involved not only in operational aspects but also in the broader tourism decision-making processes. Lastly, fostering partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards can help provide the necessary resources, technical expertise, and support for sustainable tourism development. Collectively, these measures would not only empower Kampung Chitty to strengthen its cultural heritage tourism efforts but also serve as a replicable model for other small heritage communities facing similar challenges.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and community leaders to strengthen cultural heritage tourism development. First, capacity-building initiatives should be prioritized by organizing workshops on communication, tourism management, and digital marketing, alongside training programs in guiding, storytelling, and cultural presentation—particularly tailored to engage younger generations. Second, infrastructure improvement is essential, including the enhancement of visitor facilities such as signage, public restrooms, resting areas, and walkways, as well as investing in community-based tourism infrastructure that upholds both cultural and environmental sustainability. Third, youth engagement programs should be implemented through mentorship schemes that enable elders to transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations, and by incorporating cultural heritage education within local schools and community activities. Fourth, inclusive and participatory planning is recommended through the establishment of community advisory boards to ensure residents have a voice in tourism-related decision-making, and by fostering partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards to encourage bottom-up development approaches. Finally, the promotion of hybrid heritage identity should be emphasized by highlighting Kampung Chitty's unique blend of Hindu, Malay, and Chinese cultural practices as a distinctive tourism brand, while developing niche heritage tourism packages centered on food, rituals, and festivals to attract culturally motivated visitors.

While this study provides important insights, it is not without limitations. The small sample size of five participants, though adequate for qualitative depth, limits generalizability. Findings are context-specific to Kampung Chitty and may not represent other heritage communities with different socio-economic or cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study primarily focused on community perspectives, without integrating the roles of policymakers, NGOs, or tourism operators who influence tourism planning and implementation.

Future studies could build upon this research in several ways to deepen the understanding of cultural heritage tourism dynamics. First, researchers could include larger and more diverse samples that reflect generational, gender, and occupational differences, providing a broader and more representative view of community perspectives. Second, examining decision-making dynamics in tourism planning would offer valuable insights into the extent and effectiveness of community participation and influence in shaping tourism development. Third, comparative studies involving different small heritage communities across Malaysia and Southeast Asia could help uncover contextual variations and shared challenges in sustaining cultural heritage tourism. Fourth, integrating the perspectives of external stakeholders—such as government agencies, NGOs, and tourism operators— would enable a more holistic analysis of the barriers and enablers that shape heritage tourism outcomes. Lastly, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measurements of willingness and readiness could enhance the robustness and depth of future research findings.

In general, this study intends to explore the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community in Malacca to participate in CHT. The findings reveal that while residents exhibit strong cultural pride, deep community attachment, and a willingness to share their heritage, readiness challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited technical skills, and youth disengagement constrain their capacity for sustained participation.

The first research objective is to assess current community involvement, was met, with evidence showing that most elders actively contribute to festivals, rituals, and cultural promotion, while younger members participate less frequently. The second objective, to identify factors influencing willingness—was achieved by demonstrating that both economic incentives and cultural authenticity motivate participation, alongside sustainability awareness and family traditions. The third objective, to evaluate community readiness—highlighted strengths in cultural knowledge and storytelling skills but also exposed gaps in infrastructure, tourism management, and youth engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by extending models of community participation (Arnstein, 1969; Tosun, 2006) to small, hybrid cultural communities. It emphasizes the dual role of economic and cultural motivations, the importance of generational dynamics, and the constraints posed by infrastructural deficiencies. Practically, the findings underscore the necessity for inclusive, capacity-building approaches that empower local communities in tourism development.

7. CONCLUSION

This study explored the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community in Malacca to participate in cultural heritage tourism (CHT). The findings reveal that while residents demonstrate strong cultural pride, deep community attachment, and a willingness to share their heritage, readiness challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient technical skills, and declining youth engagement constrain their ability to sustain participation. Elders continue to play a central role as cultural custodians, especially in rituals and festivals, while younger members show weaker participation, reflecting generational divides in heritage preservation.

The study offers several novel contributions to the literature. It highlights the dual influence of economic and cultural motivations in shaping willingness to participate, showing that financial benefits alone are not sufficient without cultural authenticity, particularly in relation to food heritage. It also emphasizes intergenerational dynamics, with elders safeguarding traditions while younger generations disengage, creating challenges for long-term continuity. By focusing on the hybrid identity of the Chitty community, the research shows how cultural hybridity both enriches tourism potential and increases vulnerability to change. Finally, the study demonstrates that cultural richness does not automatically equate to readiness, as infrastructural and skill gaps remain significant barriers.

Practically, the findings underscore the need for capacity-building initiatives that equip residents with skills in communication, tourism management, and digital promotion. Infrastructure improvements such as signage, restrooms, and resting areas are essential for enhancing visitor experiences. Youth engagement is particularly critical, and can be fostered through programs like mentorship, heritage education, and workshops that blend storytelling, culinary practices, and cultural presentations. Inclusive and participatory planning is equally important, ensuring that community members are not only implementers but also decision-makers in tourism development. Partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards can further strengthen community capacity, while promotion strategies that highlight the Chitty community's hybrid heritage identity can position it as a distinctive cultural tourism destination.

This research, however, is not without limitations. The small sample size, though sufficient for qualitative depth, restricts the generalizability of findings. Results are context-specific to Kampung Chitty and may not represent other heritage communities with different socio-economic or cultural settings. Moreover, the study primarily captured community perspectives without integrating those of policymakers, NGOs, or tourism operators who also influence tourism outcomes.

Future research could build on these findings by including larger and more diverse samples that reflect generational, gender, and occupational variations. Comparative studies across different small heritage communities in Malaysia and Southeast Asia would offer valuable insights into contextual similarities and differences. Incorporating external stakeholders such as government agencies and NGOs would provide a more holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers of community

participation. Finally, employing mixed-methods approaches could strengthen the analysis by complementing qualitative insights with quantitative measures of willingness and readiness.

In summary, this study contributes to knowledge by extending models of community participation to small, hybrid cultural communities and emphasizing the interplay between economic and cultural motivations and intergenerational dynamics. Practically, it offers concrete strategies to empower communities through inclusive planning, skills development, and heritage-sensitive tourism practices. By addressing readiness gaps while preserving cultural identity, Kampung Chitty and similar communities can achieve sustainable, community-driven cultural tourism that benefits both residents and visitors, ensuring their heritage thrives for future generations.

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