

Preservation of Traditional Orang Asli Temiar Architecture through Chalet Development in Kampung Stay Pos Hau, Gua Musang

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how traditional Orang Asli Temiar architecture can be preserved through chalet development in Kampung Stay Pos Hau, Gua Musang. The Temiar people, part of the Senoi group, have a strong connection to nature, which is reflected in their use of natural materials to build homes. As modernisation continues, many traditional practices are being replaced, raising concerns about the loss of cultural heritage. Using qualitative methods and an ethnographic approach, the research involved fieldwork in the Temiar community, including interviews and observations. The findings show that the chalets maintain essential features of traditional Temiar houses, such as raised floors, open spaces, and natural materials. These chalets help preserve architectural traditions, attract tourists, and support the local economy. However, challenges remain, including limited knowledge among younger generations, difficulty finding natural materials, and a lack of funding. The study concludes that tourism can be essential in preserving Temiar architecture. Support from the government, NGOs, and the community is needed to strengthen these efforts through education, documentation, and active participation.

Keywords: Traditional architecture, Orang Asli Temiar, chalet development, Kampung Stay, cultural preservation

INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia are generally known as the Orang Asli, a minority group in Malaysia that comprises 0.6% of the Malaysian population (SyedHussain & Hassan, 2017). In Malaysia, the Orang Asli are divided into three main groups, which are Senoi, Proto-Malay, and Negrito, consisting of a total of 18 ethnic subgroups (Table 1). Senoi are the largest group among the three main ethnic groups of Orang Asli in Malaysia, which represent 54.9%, followed by the Proto-Malays (42.3%) and the Negritos (2.8%), who are considered to be gradually disappearing. (SyedHussain & Hassan, 2017; Abraham & Mathews, 2021).

The study focused on the Temiar of the Senoi in Kampung Stay Pos Hau in Kelantan. Kampung Stay Pos Hau is about 80 km from Gua Musang town. The Temiar community is Kelantan's largest Orang Asli group, with a population of 15,237 out of the total Orang Asli population of 17,487 (JAKOA, 2022).

Table 1: Classification of Orang Asli Ethnic Groups in Malaysia

Main Group	Ethnic Groups
1. Senoi	1. Temiar
	2. Semai
	3. Che Wong

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Jahut 5. Mah Meri 6. Semoq Beri
2. Proto-Malay	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temua 2. Semelai 3. Jakun 4. Kanaq 5. Kuala 6. Seletar
3. Negrito	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kensiu 2. Kintak 3. Jahai 4. Lanoh 5. Mendriq 6. Bateq

Source: Website JAKOA, 2025

This study explores the preservation of traditional Temiar Orang Asli architecture by developing chalets in Kampung Stay Pos Hau, Gua Musang. In Peninsular Malaysia, the Temiar people are a sub-ethnic group of the Senoi group, with a population dispersed between the Perak and Kelantan borders. Integrating indigenous architectural heritage into tourism is a significant effort to sustain cultural identity while supporting local economic growth. The Temiar community, genuinely connected to their natural surroundings, has long relied on locally sourced materials such as bamboo, rattan, and timber to construct their homes. These structures, wisely designed as nature-friendly, reflect the practical and cultural significance of Orang Asli in Malaysia (Lambin et al., 2019).

The development of chalets in Kampung Stay Pos Hau offers a way to safeguard Temiar architectural traditions while adapting them for tourism. By incorporating authentic design elements, such as traditional structure methods and locally sourced materials, these chalets serve as accommodations and cultural attractions that educate visitors about Temiar heritage. This initiative also contributes to eco-tourism by promoting sustainable building practices that link with the Orang Asli's way of life (Mariam et al., 2024).

This study examines how the chalet development process helps protect Temiar architectural identity while generating economic opportunities for the local community. It will assess the key features of traditional Temiar houses, explore their adaptation in the tourism sector, and evaluate the long-term impact of heritage-based tourism on cultural preservation. However, several challenges have been identified. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the sustainable conservation of Temiar architectural heritage for future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Extinction of Orang Asli Traditional Architecture

The Orang Asli community in Malaysia has a distinct way of life, including unique beliefs, cultural practices, and artistic expressions that differentiate them from other ethnic groups. (Roddin & Sharipah, 2013). In the current era of globalisation, modernisation and development of modern infrastructure have changed the lifestyle of the Orang Asli, as well as in terms of architecture (Mustapha et al., 2024). Furthermore, many traditional houses in Orang Asli settlements have been replaced with stone or concrete houses. Although these changes bring benefits in terms of safety and convenience, they also threaten the existence of the traditional architecture of Orang Asli, which is rich in cultural and historical values, thus causing the Orang Asli to lose their identity (Khong et al., 2020).

As Malaysia is known as a multi-race country, maintaining the living heritage of Orang Asli is crucial because it is the cornerstone of their identities and cultures. Moreover, the continued preservation of this heritage will unavoidably strengthen Indigenous peoples' identities and cultures for the time ahead. The government has made commendable efforts by providing new settlements with modern-style housing for the Orang Asli. However, it must also take proactive measures to preserve traditional Orang Asli architecture and prevent it from becoming obsolete (Surat et al., 2011).

According to Abdullah et al. (2020), the Orang Asli are well known to be very close to nature. Likewise, the Temiar tribe illustrates their way of life in peace with nature through their house architecture, as they only use natural resources to build houses appropriate for their environment. They believe that if they violate nature-related taboos or rituals, they will become ill or die due to a natural disaster (Lambin et al., 2019). Traditionally, Temiar houses were designed to support communal living while providing comfort in the tropical climate. Features such as elevated floors for ventilation, open spaces for social interaction, and lightweight yet durable materials reflect the community's deep understanding of sustainable construction. However, modernisation has gradually replaced many of these traditional architectural elements with more modern materials and techniques. As a result, the younger generation of Orang Asli is increasingly disconnected from their architectural heritage, raising concerns about preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

Indigenous Tourism in Malaysia

Tourism is one of the leading sectors contributing to Malaysia's economic development. Malaysia has great potential to attract tourists from both domestic and international sources as it presents diverse culture, a rich natural environment, and a unique historical heritage (UNWTO, 2021). In line with the 12th Malaysia Plan, the government has implemented various initiatives to improve the well-being of the Orang Asli community. However, until now, a large part of the Orang Asli community is still in poverty (Rahim et al., 2024). According to Zanisah & Yeoh (2019), the Orang Asli community needs to make changes aligned with mainstream development and not just focus on a traditional economy based only on forest resources. For instance, POS Kuala Mu, which is famous for its natural beauty and is active in eco-tourism activities, will be the first Orang Asli settlement in the Kuala Kangsar district to be removed from the hardcore poverty category by 2025 (Nor et al., 2023). Moreover, eco-tourism activities in Sungai Tonggang, Perak, and Kampung Peta are also good examples of the success in empowering the tourism sector for the rural Orang Asli community, especially from an economic perspective (Razzaq et al., 2018; Official Portal of the Ministry of Communications, 2025).

Tourism, especially in rural areas such as Orang Asli settlements, has great potential to preserve local culture and socio-economic development (Razak et al., 2023). Orang Asli settlements usually have stunning natural beauty and a unique regional culture. Indigenous tourism in Malaysia involves the Orang Asli population, which has a rich cultural legacy and is one type of tourism introduced by the government. It promotes the culture and heritage of the indigenous people of Malaysia, the Orang Asli, including distinctive traditional architecture. In addition to reflect their identity and way of life, this building also shows how closely they are connected to the natural world (Nicholas, 2000). Therefore, indigenous tourism focused on the Orang Asli not only has the potential to attract tourists but also plays a vital role in preserving their traditional architecture.

Indigenous tourism offers a great opportunity in the effort to preserve traditional Orang Asli architecture. By attracting tourists to experience life in conventional villages firsthand, Orang Asli communities can maintain and continue their architectural practices. Programs such as homestays or kampung stay allow tourists to understand the way of life, customs, and architecture passed down from generation to generation (Mohd. Yusof & Abdullah, 2020). Additionally, the increasing demand for community-based tourism also provides economic benefits to Orang Asli communities, thus encouraging them to continue to preserve their architectural heritage.

Besides economic benefits, indigenous tourism can raise awareness about the importance of preserving traditional heritage. Support from the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and tourism bodies can strengthen preservation efforts by promoting education and organising exhibitions that showcase

traditional architecture (Kasim, 2018). Initiatives such as reconstructing traditional houses, documenting construction techniques, and community participation in the tourism industry can help ensure that Orang Asli architecture continues to be valued and passed down to future generations.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. Primary data were collected through fieldwork in the Orang Asli community of Gua Musang. The main objective of this fieldwork was to obtain firsthand information as the core dataset. Simultaneously, secondary data were gathered from various sources to support the primary findings and contextualise the research topic. The ethnographic approach was applied throughout the fieldwork by engaging with several villagers, including community leaders such as Tok Batin, Tok Penghulu, and other residents. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain information directly from informants. The study involved three key informants (IR1, IR2, IR3). Data collection methods included interviews and participant observation. The collected data were then analysed using NVivo 12 software, which facilitated thematic classification and organisation. Through this software, the researcher could systematically categorise the data according to predefined themes. The information and data obtained were analysed in detail so that the study results could be presented clearly.

FINDINGS

Elements of Traditional Temiar Architecture

According to Mariam et al. (2024), people adapted considerably to their natural surroundings and learned from studying nature in the early stages. Various tools and equipment are obtained from the environment to meet daily requirements. The settlement of the Temiar tribe is usually concentrated in the border area between the states of Perak and Kelantan, especially around the highlands and along the rivers. Therefore, the highland and forest environments, where the Temiar generally reside, have various types of plants that can be used as a food source. In addition, these plants are also exploited as the primary building material in the construction of residential houses (Isa & Saidin, 2017). The findings indicate that the chalet development at Kampung Stay Pos Hau successfully integrates several key architectural elements of traditional Temiar houses using natural resources (Figure 1, Figure 2 & Figure 3). Based on the fieldwork and research conducted, the selection of building materials for Orang Asli traditional architecture is as stated in Table 2.



Figure 1: Chalet



Figure 2: Inside the Chalet



Figure 3: Alang

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Table 2: Selection of Building Materials for Orang Asli Traditional Architecture

Building Material	Function	Justification
Bamboo	Primary structure (walls, floors)	Lightweight, strong and easily available from the forest
Wood	Main pillar, Alang (used for thatching roofs) and stairs	Ensures structural stability
Bertam/Nipah Leaves	Roofing	Provides good thermal insulation
Rattan/ Bertam Leaves	Fastener	Strengthens the structure without modern nails

Source: Fieldwork (2025); Isa & Saidin (2017)

Figure 1 shows a traditional Orang Asli Temiar house in Kampung Stay Pos Hau, which was commercialised as a chalet known as Rumah Buluh. Bamboo is the primary material for making houses by the Temiar tribe because it is light, strong, and environmentally friendly. The selection of materials, especially bamboo, is also essential when building a house to be built well and last longer. They will split bamboo to make walls and floors supported by several wooden logs, such as pillars and Alang, while the roof is made from bertam leaves, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 illustrates the woven bamboo wall panels, which showcase traditional Temiar weaving techniques that enhance ventilation and reflect the original spatial simplicity of the house, typically consisting of a single open area. In the chalet adaptation, a mattress has been added to provide comfort for overnight tourists while maintaining the traditional layout. The use of bertam leaves in the roofing, as shown in Figure 3, demonstrates indigenous thermal insulation strategies that are both sustainable and culturally significant. However, these materials are becoming increasingly scarce due to environmental changes and limited availability. Besides bertam leaves, the Temiar used Nipah leaves to create a roof (Isa & Saidin, 2017). This statement is supported by IR 1, IR 2:

“Secara tradisinya, masyarakat Temiar menggunakan buluh untuk buat rumah. Buluh dan kayu la. Buluh lebih kepada buat dinding dan lantai jadi selebihnya kayu untuk tiang dan alang-alang dia. Pemilihan buluh pon penting, tak boleh terlalu muda dan terlalu tua. Kalau boleh yang sedang-sedang saje lagi baik. Kalau muda jenis cepat kecut, kalau tua cepat patah manakala yang sedang ni tahan lama la.”

Translation:

"Traditionally, Temiar people use bamboo to build houses, mostly bamboo and wood. Bamboo is usually used for walls and floors; the rest, like the pillars and beams, are made of wood. Choosing the right bamboo is important, too. It can't be too young or too old. The best ones are in between. If it's too young, it shrinks fast, but if it's too old, it breaks easily. The ones in the middle last longer.

(IR 1)

“Buluh ni diracik-racik (belah) dulu, kemudian baru kite anyam jadikan dinding. Atap pula gunakan daun bertam”

Translation:

"The bamboo is split up first, and then we weave it to make the walls. As for the roof, we use bertam leaves."

(IR 2)

There are stairs made of hardwood tied with rattan, which the Orang Asli Temiar tribe only utilised forest resources in building houses. However, this practical tradition is increasingly not practised because it has been replaced by using nails, which are faster and easier. The floor of a house usually has a height of between 2 and 3 meters from the ground. According to the previous Temiar community, the house floor is raised to protect

from wild animal attacks and ensure good ventilation. The lower part of the Temiar house is usually used to shelter a group of pet dogs that act as guardians of the house and hunting animals (Surat et al., 2011).

Preserving Traditional Architecture Through Tourism

The tourism sector in rural areas, particularly in Orang Asli settlements, has excellent potential to help preserve local culture (Razak et al., 2023). Through this initiative, local communities can introduce and share their cultural heritage, including architecture, music, dance, customs, and traditional cuisine, with visitors. At the same time, this effort increases community awareness of the importance of safeguarding their cultural identity in the face of modernisation, ensuring that these traditions continue to be passed down to future generations (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Sapkota et al., 2024).

Kampung stay under the Malaysian Homestay Experience Program were officially introduced by the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism of Malaysia in 2012 (Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture, 2015). According to the Official Portal of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture, the concept of kampung stay is being expanded in line with the current mainstream tourism development, which aims to improve living standards, especially in rural villages, through the tourism sector. Kampung stay is a form of tourism that offers accommodation in rural villages without staying with the host family, but still allows tourists to engage in local lifestyle and cultural experiences (Ramele et al., 2017). For instance, Kampung Stay Pos Hau is one of the rural tourism attractions developed independently by the Orang Asli community in the village since 2010 (Figure 4). Government agencies, particularly the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), have supported this project, which has identified Pos Hau's potential as an eco-tourism site. JAKOA has also provided funding to build a chalet and training to help kampung stay operators become actively involved in the tourism industry.



Figure 4: Entrance for Kampung Stay Pos Hau

Furthermore, the chalets at Kampung Stay Pos Hau are designed in the traditional Temiar architectural style, with natural materials such as bamboo, wood, and bertam leaves. Using these materials emphasises the distinctness of Orang Asli traditional architecture and promotes sustainable and eco-friendly construction practices. The chalets' distinct structure draws visitors, particularly those seeking a genuine cultural experience of Orang Asli ways of living. Thus, the development of chalets based on traditional architecture is a vital way to preserve the architectural history of Temiar dwellings for future generations.

Lastly, tourism through the development of a chalet in Kampung Stay Pos Hau has been proven to help improve the standard of living of local communities, especially in rural areas, by opening up job opportunities and helping to generate income. Tourism is an essential platform for Orang Asli communities to promote rural

development in their settlement areas and help reduce poverty among Orang Asli through their active involvement in this industry (Mansor et al., 2019). According to Roddin et al. (2022), tourism is seen to have a special role in improving the poverty situation of Orang Asli communities because tourism provides many opportunities and benefits to the Orang Asli community itself. This statement was also shared by the IR 3 through an interview at Kampung Stay Pos Hau:

“Pemilik chalet di sini sendiri-sendiri. Bila ada pelancong masuk, boleh la menampung ekonomi sikit-sikit. Kita akan bagi upah juga pada orang kampung untuk bersih kawasan ni Pekerja untuk mesin rumput dan bakar sampah tu semua.”

Translation :

"The chalet owners here are all independent. When tourists come, it helps a bit with income. We also pay the villagers to help clean up the area, like cutting the grass and burning the rubbish and all that."

(IR 3)

Challenges in Preserving Traditional Architecture

Based on the interviews, one of the challenges in preserving traditional Temiar architecture is the lack of knowledge among Orang Asli youth regarding their traditional architecture, which is a growing concern. The younger generation is becoming less well-known and losing interest in conventional construction techniques, since they are more used to modern influences, and formal education has shifted their focus towards other fields. Many young Orang Asli choose to work in urban areas, resulting in fewer skilled individuals capable of maintaining traditional building practices. Without proper training and awareness programs, there is a risk that the knowledge of constructing traditional Temiar houses may fade over time.

The second challenge is finding natural materials to build and maintain the house. Materials like bamboo, hardwood, and bertam leaves were readily available in the past, but now they are becoming harder to find. Deforestation, land development, and environmental changes have reduced access to these essential materials. Some materials, such as bamboo and bertam leaves, are hard to find and need to be ordered from the suppliers, which increases costs. This situation forces some villagers to look for alternative materials that are more convenient and reduce the costs, which may not fully maintain the authenticity of traditional Temiar houses.

Last, the main challenge in developing chalets at Kampung Stay Pos Hau is the lack of funding due to limited support from government agencies. Although efforts have been made to promote tourism, the financial aid provided is often insufficient for the maintenance and long-term development of the chalets. Without sufficient funds, the local community finds it difficult to obtain materials and upgrade the chalets, making it difficult to ensure proper care. As a result, 5 out of 10 chalets in Kampung Stay Pos Hau remain in good condition but still require repairs.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the development of chalets in Kampung Stay Pos Hau plays a vital role in preserving the traditional architecture of the Orang Asli Temiar by balancing sustainability with tourism. The government, relevant stakeholders, local communities, heritage bodies, and tourists must work collectively to safeguard the uniqueness and identity of Orang Asli architecture as an integral part of Malaysia's cultural heritage. A more comprehensive strategy is needed to address the challenges identified, including raising awareness, providing financial support, and encouraging the proactive involvement of the Orang Asli in tourism management.

A more comprehensive approach is needed to address the challenges identified in this study, including raising public awareness, securing financial support, and promoting active participation of the Orang Asli in tourism management. The motivation behind this research stems from the urgent need to preserve indigenous architectural traditions amid increasing pressures from modernization and commercial tourism. By

documenting and analyzing the Temiar chalets, this study contributes to a growing body of knowledge that advocates for culturally responsive design and participatory development strategies. It highlights how indigenous architectural practices can serve as heritage assets and catalysts for economic empowerment and cultural continuity.

Finally, to ensure the long-term sustainability of Temiar architectural heritage, youth engagement is critical. Initiatives such as hands-on building workshops, digital documentation projects, and participation in eco-tourism activities can foster skill retention and cultural pride among younger Orang Asli. These efforts safeguard traditional knowledge and empower youth to become active custodians of their heritage, ensuring its transmission to future generations.

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