

Heritage Hotels and the Question of Authenticity

คำถากำว่าด้วยความแท้จริงของเออร์ริเทจโฮเต็ล

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Abstract

Culturally savvy tourists are one of the traveller groups who prefer to stay in the hotels that are able to distinctively provide individual experiences that they cannot find anywhere else. Using heritage buildings as fabric then applying adaptive and re-use concepts as a boutique hotel is one of the alternatives to both serve the demand of this traveller group and preserve the heritage in Thailand simultaneously.

The aim of this dissertation has been to survey and find potential heritage buildings for applying adaptive and re-use concepts, to identify the constraints relating to the legal, financial and cultural factors that militate against such practices of re-cycling, and to find a feasible way and key success factors to run a boutique hotel in heritage buildings under the constraints of cultural, legal, and economic realities in Thailand. The study was based on

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interviews and survey of selected buildings categorized into three types of heritage hotels: Original Heritage Hotels, Heritage Hotels that apply an adaptive and re-use approach and Nostalgic Heritage Hotels. There are also two additional hybrid categories situated between these categories. The study also provided a discussion on the question of authenticity of the heritage hotel through a case study of Nan Fa hotel vs. Rachamankha hotel – the interrelated categories of ‘Originally built as a hotel’ and ‘Re-use of Historic Building as Fabric’ vs. ‘Nostalgic Heritage Hotel’. The surveys were conducted during September 2009 to May 2012. It was found that to apply adaptive and re-use programs to heritage buildings is not a straightforward approach that can be applied in every case. Rather, an analysis of the economic, social and cultural conditions is an inescapable pre-requisite. There are also financial, legal and time constraints. If we are to find solutions to overcome these, then we may find a way to run a successful boutique hotel business to serve the current trend of tourists who demand to find a place that provides what they see as ‘authentic’ experiences to them. Those types of tourists will not tend to negotiate but are willing to pay a ‘premium’ if the boutique hotel can provide services that are beyond their expectations. Furthermore, a study of the question of ‘authentic’ design to underlie the creation of ‘architectural excellence’ in the adaptive re-use of heritage buildings requires much further commitment in Thailand in the future.

Keywords : Heritage Hotel, Architectural Heritage, Tourism

บทคัดย่อ

ในบรรดาคนท่องเที่ยวประเภทต่างๆ นักท่องเที่ยวที่เดินทางเพื่อศึกษาศิลปวัฒนธรรมความเป็นอยู่ของคนในแหล่งท่องเที่ยว (Culturally savvy tourists) คือกลุ่มนักท่องเที่ยวที่มีความพึงใจในการเลือกพักในโรงแรมที่สามารถเสริมสร้างประสบการณ์ใหม่ๆ ไม่เหมือนใคร (individual experiences) ดังนั้น การสร้างโรงแรมโดยการปรับเปลี่ยนอาคารเก่าแก่และมีคุณค่าควรแก่การอนุรักษ์ภายใต้แนวคิดเพื่อการพัฒนาระบบ อาทิ การปรับเปลี่ยนเป็นบูติกไฮเต็ล (Boutique Hotel) ก็เป็นอีกทางเลือกหนึ่งที่นอกจากจะช่วยเติมเต็มอุปสงค์ของนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มดังกล่าวได้ อีกทั้งยังเป็นการอนุรักษ์มรดกทางวัฒนธรรมในประเทศไทยไปในตัวอีกทางหนึ่งด้วย

งานวิจัยนี้เป้าหมายคือการสำรวจและค้นหาอาคารที่มีคุณค่าควรแก่การอนุรักษ์และมีศักยภาพในการปรับเปลี่ยนเป็นบูติกไฮเต็ล เพื่อค้นหาข้อจำกัด หรือข้อบังคับที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกฎหมาย, การเงิน, และปัจจัยทางด้านวัฒนธรรม ต่างๆ ที่เกิดขึ้นกับกรณีศึกษาของการปรับเปลี่ยนอาคารดังกล่าว รวมไปถึงการค้นหาปัจจัยแห่งความสำเร็จของการแข่งขัน (Key Success Factors) ในการบริหารและจัดการบูติกไฮเต็ลในประเทศไทยได้ข้อจำกัดที่ได้กล่าวไว้ข้างต้น การศึกษารั้งนี้กระทำโดยการสัมภาษณ์และสำรวจเชอร์วิจไฮเต็ล (Heritage Hotels) ที่ได้ถูกคัดเลือกและได้รับการจัดแบ่งเป็น 3 ประเภท ดังนี้ 1) โรงแรมที่ถูกสร้างขึ้นในอดีตและมีประวัติศาสตร์อันยาวนานและมีคุณค่าในการอนุรักษ์ (Original Heritage Hotels) 2) โรงแรมที่เกิดจากการปรับเปลี่ยนจากการเก่าที่มีคุณค่าแก่การอนุรักษ์เพื่อเป็นบูติกไฮเต็ล (Heritage Hotels that apply and adaptive and re-use approach) และ 3) โรงแรมที่สร้างใหม่โดยอิงการออกแบบของอาคารเก่า (Nostalgic Heritage Hotels) นอกจากนี้ในการศึกษา ยังพบว่า มีโรงแรมอีกสองประเภทที่ควบคู่กับโรงแรม 3 ประเภทข้างต้น ซึ่งจะขอเรียกว่าประเภทลูกผสม (hybrid categories)

นอกจากนี้งานวิจัยยังได้นำเสนอทบทวนนาว่าด้วย “ความน่าด้วยความแท้จริง (Authenticity) ของเชอร์วิจไฮเต็ล” ผ่านกรณีศึกษาของโรงแรมน่านฟ้าและโรงแรมราชมรรคา – ทั้งสองโรงแรมอยู่ในประเภทโรงแรมแบบลูกผสมระหว่างประเภท 1 และ 2 กับ แบบลูกผสมระหว่างประเภท 2 และ 3

ตามลำดับ ขอบเขตของการวิจัยอยู่ในช่วงเวลาระหว่างเดือนกันยายน พ.ศ. 2552 ถึงเดือนพฤษภาคม พ.ศ. 2555 จากการศึกษาพบว่าการปรับเปลี่ยนอาคารครัวค่า แก่การอนุรักษ์เพื่อเป็นบุตติคโฮเต็ลนั้นไม่ใช่วิธีที่ตรงไปตรงมาและสามารถกระทำได้ในทุกกรณี เนื่องจากเจ้าเป็นต้องคำนึงถึงปัจจัยแวดล้อมทางด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม และวัฒนธรรมเป็นจุดตั้งต้นก่อนเริ่มทำการอนุรักษ์อาคารแต่ละแห่ง ยิ่งไปกว่านั้นปัจจัยทางด้านการเงิน, กฎหมาย, และเวลาในการอนุรักษ์ก็เป็นสิ่งที่ขาดสีลมไม่ได้ในการวิเคราะห์และศึกษาอาคารทุกแห่ง หากเราสามารถค้นพบวิธีที่จะ ก้าวผ่านปัจจัยและอาจช่วยจำกัดดังกล่าวข้างต้นได้สำเร็จ ย่อมหมายถึงเรามี ความเข้าใจเพียงพอที่จะสามารถบริหารบุตติคโฮเต็ลที่อาศัยอาคารที่ควรคุ้มค่าแก่ การอนุรักษ์เป็นจุดขาย เพื่อรับอุปสงค์ของนักท่องเที่ยวในยุคปัจจุบันที่นิยม แสวงหาสถานที่ที่สามารถนำเสนอประสบการณ์ที่แท้จริง (authentic experiences) ได้สำเร็จ หากนักท่องเที่ยวทุกคนได้รับการบริการที่เหนือความ คาดหมายควบคู่กันไปด้วย พวกราคาที่จ่ายเงินในจำนวนที่มากขึ้น (premium) และกับประสบการณ์ที่ไม่เหมือนใครตามไปด้วย ท้ายที่สุดบทวิจัยนี้ ได้บุกเบิกพื้นที่วิจัยสำหรับการศึกษาในอนาคตไว้ด้วย กล่าวคือ การออกแบบเพื่อ สร้างบุตติคโฮเต็ลประเภทใดก็ตาม การออกแบบโดยคำนึงถึงเนื้อแท้ ('authentic' design) จะเป็นรากฐานสำคัญที่จะนำไปสู่การออกแบบทางสถาปัตยกรรมที่ยอด เยี่ยม ('architectural excellence') สำหรับอาคารครัวค่าแก่การอนุรักษ์เพื่อ เป็นบุตติคโฮเต็ล เพื่อการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนสืบต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : เออร์วิเทจโฮเต็ล, มรดกสถาปัตยกรรม, การท่องเที่ยว, โรงแรม

1 Introduction

Hotels have long adopted their antiquity as a marketing theme. London's Savoy (1889), New York's Plaza (1907), Paris's Ritz (1898, originally 1705) or Plaza Athénée (1911), Milan's Principe de Savoia (1928) might immediately come to mind although many European and North American cities display such establishments. While the colonial era bequeathed numbers of grand hotels to cities in Asia, these have too often been caught up in a demolish-and-redevelop rush. Exceptions would include Mumbai's Taj Mahal (1903), Singapore's Raffles (1887), Surabaya's Majapahit (1910), Hong Kong's Peninsula (1928). All of these would be claimed as part of the heritage of their respective cities. Bangkok's Oriental (originally 1879), one of the earliest and still most renowned of such colonial establishments, might also claim antiquity and it retains elements of an earlier life, yet most of its earlier establishment has long since suffered demolish-and-redevelop.

There is also a phenomenon of pretended antiquity as a marketing ploy for hotels. Entrepreneurs identify 'a taste for heritage' in travelers which can be catered for in a variety of ways: (1) old hotels are recycled through innovative though 'tasteful' renovation or even redevelopment; (2) older non-hotel buildings are recycled, not to their earlier uses but as hotels; finally, (3) there are new constructions to simulate the idea of 'an antique hotel'. All three of these strategies occur in Thailand; to observe them, also the problematic conceptual issues that they raise, is the focus of this paper.

While these three approaches might seem easily defined, in the real world of hotel marketing there are also hybrids – new construction in simulated 'older' styles will be grafted on to both

older hotels (the first category above) and re-used, non-hotel buildings (the second category). It is these hybrids and their various recourses to simulation that are especially interesting, as they challenge the very idea of heritage. Pretended heritage, yet its popular acceptance as heritage, throws any understanding of heritage into question.

Heritage

The subjectivity of the idea of heritage renders it problematic. Popular discourse speaks of World Heritage, also National, Regional and Local Heritage – all, no doubt, useful categories for referring to what various levels of community will contest, also for public policy prescriptions. However, there is also the level of personal heritage – what is memorialised and valued by each individual. Heritage at this as at all levels relates to questions of both memory and values.

One can scarcely do better than to refer to Pierre Nora's notion of memory:

Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it. It thrives on vague, telescoping reminiscences, on hazy general impressions or specific symbolic details. It is vulnerable to transferences, screen memories, censorings, and projections of all kinds. History, being an intellectual, nonreligious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse. ... Memory wells up from groups that it welds together, which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs observed, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple yet specific; collective and plural yet individual. By

contrast, history belongs to everyone and to no one and therefore has a universal vocation (Nora, 1996: 3).

Pierre Nora's magisterial seven-volume collaborative project, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, endeavoured to define, variously, the French Republic, the French nation and, finally, France as an idea. *Lieux de mémoire* – “realms of memory” although also translatable as “sites” – will cover the range of places, both physical and intellectual, wherein the memories of ‘a nation’ might be constructed, contained and contested. Central to Nora's argument is the idea of sites of memory (heritage?) as compensation for a profound loss: in the modern age most people no longer live in milieux de mémoire, environments of memory. So, Nora adds, “Lieux de memoire exist because there are no longer any milieux de memoire, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience” (1996: 1).

Recreated ‘heritage’, whether in a ‘heritage hotel’ or elsewhere, attempts to present lieux de mémoire to the consumer (architectural style, real or pretended antiques, costumed staff) to create the simulation of a milieu de mémoire – to take them back into an idea of the past. We are considering here that difference between history (the ‘scientific’ search for an understanding of the past) and memory (heritage, tradition – the desire to return, vicariously, to a selected past). Further, nothing could be more ‘selected’ than a carefully designed, ‘reproduction’ hotel room.

This idea of designed heritage raises the further question of the simulacrum – the repeated appearance as the reality.

The problem of simulacra

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has argued that in the present age – he terms it the age of “consumer capitalism” –

domination is no longer effected through capital (as means of production and as commodities produced) but increasingly through appearances and images. We consume no longer products but signs – of television, of advertising; the material objects of consumption have value for us precisely as signs – of identity, of status, of culture, of achievement and so on (Baudrillard, 1972). Baudrillard's boldest assertion is that the code supplants the sign, that the era of the code supersedes the era of the sign (Baudrillard, 1993). The code, here, is easily understood: it is the binary code of computer technology, the DNA code in biology, the digital code in information technology; it is also, however, the 'code' that would define the idea of heritage. Crucial is the connection between the code and reproduction – in the era of the code there is no original and the object produced is not a 'copy'. It is reproduction that is original and the difference between the old idea of the original and its copy is now redundant.

Certainly reproduction hotels are designed to a code which may relate to an earlier, existing building, to elements of an indigenous vernacular, or to techniques to give the pretense of age to a new building. When a new establishment repeats elements of an earlier establishment that was itself a reproduction, then Baudrillard's prediction of 'no original and no copy' is upon us.

While the extreme position of the Baudrillard argument is far from universally accepted – originality and creativity still reign supreme – nevertheless the power of the code in proliferation is abundantly before us, in endless reproducibility, references with no referents, hyper-reality. We leave the age of production to enter the age of reproduction, and the world of reality to enter that of the simulacrum – everything a copy, as the distinction between original and copy disappears (Baudrillard, 1994).

So, how is one to distinguish between the ‘real’ antique hotel and the fake, reconstructed, heritage hotel simulacrum? The answer to this dilemma might be sought by recourse to the idea of ‘authenticity’. Yet this term, too, is problematic; it is an issue to which we will return.

The question of methodology

While the focus of the present paper is on ‘making sense’ of the phenomenon of so-called ‘heritage hotels’ in Thailand, its conceptual concern is with the issues of heritage and authenticity that these projects raise. We take the tri-partite classification of such hotels, introduced above, as a structuring device. Hotels in Thailand that might claim some ‘heritage’ appeal are placed in that framework; in the project reported here, they were visited and their entrepreneurs interviewed to seek ‘the story’ behind each.

The objective, in this survey, was to enable a critical reflection on the questions: “What is heritage”, and “How does one judge authenticity”.

2 Heritage hotels

We begin with the classification of ‘heritage hotels’ introduced above – (1) older hotels recycled and redeveloped, (2) older non-hotel buildings recycled as hotels, to capitalize on their claim on antiquity, and (3) newly developed hotels that attempt to emulate styles of architecture, décor and service imagined from the past. This framework is displayed graphically in Figure 1, below.

Heritage Hotel Category with a list of hotels in this study

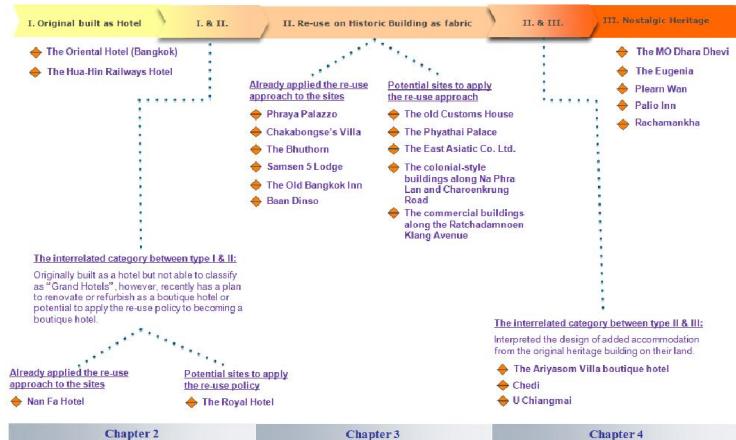


Figure 1. A classification of heritage hotel types

(1) Older hotels recycled and redeveloped

In Thailand, only three old hotels remain healthy in terms of business, albeit by adopting a chain system such as the Mandarin group, Accor group and Centara in the cases of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, the Centara Grand Beach Resort and Villa Hua Hin respectively. These chains expanded the size of the hotels to serve the increasing number of travellers whilst keeping the original building as cultural capital that continues to generate income for the hotel nowadays.



Figure 2. The Author's Residence that, restored, becomes a source of cultural capital for the now redeveloped Oriental Hotel.

(2) Older non-hotel buildings recycled as hotels, to capitalize on their claim on antiquity

From our survey, we learned from various successful entrepreneurs who applied adaptive and re-use approaches into their heritage buildings in several locations, especially within the historic Rattanakosin Island area of Bangkok. A clear theme with appropriate style and manners is a pre-requisite to differentiate themselves from the ordinary guesthouses or small hotels located nearby. The range of investment varied from 700,000 to 20 million baht, as found in our survey, so it is presumed to be a challenge for any project to take the break-even period as a major consideration when presenting their feasibility study or business plan to discuss financing such a project with a bank. Another constraint is the fact that there are no supporting laws available at the moment to run a small hotel that provides more than four rooms of accommodation in Thailand. Some owners have had to manipulate their guest receipts by breaking down items as a 'rent' on their furniture rather than as a payment for a room. However, we found two outstanding

examples of boutique hotel and hostel, the Bhutorn and Baan Dinso, both recognized as No. 1 rank in several respected travel websites and who had received very positive feedback for their excellent services.

(3) Newly developed hotels that attempt to emulate styles of architecture, décor and service imagined from the past.

Among several styles of nostalgic types, two were considered: (1) those inspired by local indigenous architecture, specifically by a local temple and its architecture and (2) colonial style influenced constructions as represented by Rachamankha and The Eugenia. They overcame the limitations of their location by building replicated heritage buildings in a location where no such old building had previously existed. However, both of these hotels became successful newly built hotels with a nostalgic theme as their customers perceived both places as ‘genuine’ heritage buildings. Essentially, though the differentiated design can be the selling point, the crucial factor in the hotel business, including the heritage hotel business, is always the excellent services provided by the staff.



Figure 3. Rachamankha Hotel – architectural excellence

(4) *Older hotel buildings recycled as boutique hotels, to capitalize on their claim on antiquity but with refurbished interiors to serve the new demand. (Hybrid Heritage Type I)*

The “Phuka Nanfa” hotel was originally known as “Nanfa Hotel”. Located in the heart of Nan, the small and peaceful province in the Northern part of Thailand, the building was constructed by teak wood during the World War II period and is still standing with the original function as a hotel, named “Nanfa hotel”, now for 76 years, before being taken over by the CEO of Kasikorn Bank, Mr. Banthoon Lamsam, in 2009 for 24 million baht with an aim to renovate it as a boutique hotel to serve wealthy customers. The recycling program was intended to keep only the outer structure while reviving the original façade by added a new colour scheme and emblem from what the hotel had looked like for more than 50

years. No doubt, not only the ‘authenticity’ of the hotel itself has deteriorated, but also something that ‘money can’t buy’ – history.



Figures 4-5. Nanfa Hotel (before) and Phuka Nanfa Hotel (after)

(5) newly developed hotels that attempt to blend two styles of architecture, décor and service imagined from the original heritage building as a core of the hotel. (Hybrid Heritage Type II)

The key success factor of this type of heritage hotel is a balancing between the old and the new in their hotels. Two are considered here, namely the Chedi in U Chiang Mai and Ariyasom

Villa on Bangkok's Sukhumvit soi 1. Both kept their valued heritage building as a core of the hotel, then applying a respectful design style to their add-on buildings as accommodation to serve the customers. To apply this strategy, not only were the locations of the hotels limited but also a maintenance cost had to be considered to take care of the heritage building as a component of the necessary expenses in the long run.



Figures 6-7. The Chedi and Ariyasom Villa

According to five types of heritage hotels above, we are able to perceive that customizing a fantasy place to serve the demand of fashion would not be a sustainable development. Moreover, we can also usefully repeat the argument about the relationship between the tourist and the judgment of authenticity from the study:

“...The judgment between philosophy and tourism in the term ‘authenticity’ seems to be clear from the argument: “the tourist is not engaged in the judgment of authenticity; rather this is presented by means of prior planning involving recreation and interpretation”. It is no matter what types of tourists are involved: backpacker, tour group, or the culturally savvy visitors, they are only visitors who do not live in that place forever. To have a sustainable conservation

management, the hotel owner and designers should be the ones who are always concerned with and understand the significance of the authenticity of the place before doing the heritage project.”

Tourists should not be engaged in the judgment of authenticity, as they are persons who come, maybe once in their lifetime, then are gone forever. So, to serve the demands of tourists with their spending power but ignore the significance of the place should be avoided. We should convince the banks and financial managers to understand why the budget should be higher if we elect to keep and retain the authenticity of the place as much as we can, rather than presenting the easier way by merely replicating the past.

3 Conclusion

As intimated in 1 above, these projects throw the idea of ‘heritage’ into some contention – heritage emerges as something embedded in the imagination of the subject and, therefore, ultimately ephemeral. It would seem that the more significant, conceptual question relates to the question: what is authentic and what is inauthentic?

It is therefore with this contingent question that this paper will conclude. What is ‘authenticity’?

Authenticity: proper versus popular use

‘Authentic’ is a troublesome word in English. It might be used as a synonym or equivalent for ‘genuine’ or ‘true’; however, these are also troublesome words. In popular use it might be used to refer to something that is very old, or at least looks old. Let us consider an example: we might look at a Buddha image in the late

Ayutthayan style and say, with approval, “Ah! Authentic Ayutthayan”. What, however, if it is an early Rattanakosin period copy of the Ayutthayan style? Then we could say: “No! A copy. Definitely not authentic”. However, it might be very authentic to the early Rattanakosin goal of indicating a link to the preceding kingdom. So we are ultimately unable to judge it as authentic or inauthentic without knowledge of the intentions behind its production. Thus we need to ask: what is it attempting to ‘say’?

Let us extend the example: what if the image was made this year so that it is quite modern, yet it was made in a workshop where there is an attempt to revive/rediscover the historic bronze casting technology of the Ayutthaya period. In that case we might judge it to be authentic technologically, as it is true to the intention of reviving an ancient technology; however, we would have to say that it is inauthentic in its forms. Why does it not attempt to present the Buddha in a modern artistic idiom?

The place of ‘authenticity’ in language and the contestations in the use of the term have been much debated in philosophy and the following will try to summarise this more theoretical debate.

The contested realm of authenticity

A constant theme in discussions of culture and heritage is indeed that of ‘authenticity’. It is useful to be reminded of Lionel Trilling’s (1972) understanding of authenticity as ‘staying true to oneself’. More widely, it would refer to the attempt to live one’s life according to the needs of one’s inner being, rather than to the demands of society or one’s earlier conditioning. One comes to terms with being in a material world and with encountering external forces and influences which may be very different from oneself;

authenticity relates to one's actions and changes in responses to these pressures (Kaufmann, 1975; Taylor, 1991). Nostalgia, by contrast, is an escape from this demand (which is not to imply, however, that it is necessarily the obverse or opposite of authenticity – the two terms and their relationship need to be addressed discursively, that is in discussion or discourse).

Nostalgia is typically coloured by a melodramatic imagination. Following Peter Brooks (1976), this would be an imagination that would seek hidden moral values in a present world in which values are being destroyed. By contrast, an ironic imagination and view of history builds on ambiguity of meaning – rather than look for hidden meaning in history, irony would point to the uncertainty of history by showing that positive truth is not possible.

In this sense, and to turn to the clash between Thai versus Lao historiographies addressed in the dissertation of Suwaphat Sregongsang (2010) as an example, both representations of the conflict of 1828 are authentic although they are in quite radical disagreement; both stay true to the needs, respectively, of Thai and Lao inner being. Yet they are also both nostalgic rather than ironic. A site of evoked memory, whether the temple of the Emerald Buddha or a place of massacre, will merely harden held beliefs until memory can achieve the distance of irony. Irony, in turn, arises in dialectical thinking.

It is in the context of the ambiguity of authenticity that one will critically confront the phenomenon of heritage hotels. There will be many objectives that could be ascribed to a heritage hotel – to provide good service, to be profitable, ... There could also well be two social objectives with relevance to heritage and authenticity, namely (1) to advance the development and retention of skills, through the processes of the hotel's production and maintenance

and (2) to educate the visitor to the nature and significance of local culture, through their visits to the hotel and the hotel's use. There could well be other social objectives – for example, to strengthen local (community) identity, or to assist local employment. However skills development and heritage education (1 and 2 above) would appear especially relevant to any assessment of authenticity.

In the light of such goals, one might finally suggest that the heritage hotels in various degrees advance skills of good craftsmanship (and coincidentally assist local employment). However, their role in actually displaying local culture – that is, in educating and reinforcing local identity – is very limited.

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