

## **THE WONDER FOOD MUSEUM STORY: CELEBRATING MALAYSIA'S FOOD CULTURE AND CULINARY HERITAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Although thematic museums centered around food culture and culinary heritage have been around for decades, the *concept of food museum is still fairly new* in Southeast Asia. Only in 2015, the first food-oriented museum – “Wonder Food Museum” was established in Penang, Malaysia. Since its establishment, the museum has received positive feedback from both local and international visitors. From 2017 to 2019, the museum has been selected as the recipient of the Certificate of Excellence by international well renowned Travel organization - TripAdvisor Inc. Meanwhile, the museum’s contribution to the state’s cultural and tourism development has also been recognized by the state authority. In 2017 and 2019, the museum was awarded the ‘Top Museum Award (Unique Concept)’, and ‘Best Tourism (Museum)Award’ by the INPenang International Awards respectively. By and large, Wonder Food Museum is currently one of the most outstanding museums in Malaysia and a well-known attraction in Penang. In this paper, to response on the research scholarly interest in museum tourism in Southeast Asia, the researcher has made an attempt to document the development of Wonder Food Museum from 2015 to 2019. The museum’s curatorial concept, exhibits production, exhibition planning and its overall management will be discussed and analyzed. As the aforementioned this paper will provide insights into an understanding of food museum’s development in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Food museum, food culture, culinary heritage, Malaysia’s museum, museum tourism, interactive museum

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Tove Danovich (2015), a global enthusiasm for food museums seems to have sprung up almost overnight. Since 2010, museums dedicated to the wider world of food have gotten underway in Brooklyn, Prague, London, Chicago and etc. Danielle Oteri (2019)

also mentioned that, in recent years, “food” has been a hot topic in the field of *arts and culture*. For instance, in 2015, Milan Expo’s exhibitions focused on food culture and culinary heritage *were well* received by the public. Meanwhile, exhibitions concerning food such as “Our Global Kitchen: Food, Nature and Culture” organized by **American Museum of Natural History in 2012**, and “Eat, Drink and Be Merry: Food in the Middle Ages and Renaissance” by the Getty Center in 2015 at Los Angeles have also been massively celebrated by audiences. In 2019, a wonderful array of exhibitions on food culture have been presented by museums in Europe. For example, “Feeding History: The Politics of Food” by British Museum (London), “Food: Bigger than the Plate” by Victoria and Albert Museum (London), “Feast of Fools: Bruegel Rediscovered” by Gaasbeek Castle (Lennik), and “Café Europe: Food Ties” by Museum of European Cultures (Berlin). To *put it succinctly*, today’s museums have increasingly been highlighting food, culinary, and dining history in their exhibition schedules (Sarah Peters Kernan, 2019).

In the Asia-Pacific region, the *cultural* and social aspects of food also contribute to many nations’ museum exhibition agendas. For instance, in 2013, an exhibition celebrates Australian culinary history, “Eat Your History: A Shared Table” was presented by Museum of Sydney. In 2015, an exhibition to celebrate 50 years of normalization of diplomatic ties entitled “Food Culture in Korea and Japan: The Tastes of Nanum and Omotenashi” was presented by National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka and National Folk Museum of Korea in Seoul. In 2017, a food-themed exhibition, “Taberu wo kaku (Drawing Eating)” was organized by Ghibli Museum in Tokyo. In 2020, a special exhibition, “WASHOKU -Nature and Culture in Japanese Cuisine” was presented by National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo. In Taiwan, “The Testimony of Food” exhibition was organized by Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 2015. In 2014, Hong Kong Heritage Museum presented an exhibition “More Than Just Food” at Hong Kong International airport. In India, an exhibition on India’s ancient food culture “Historical Gastronomica - the Indus Dining Experience” was held at the National Museum (New Delhi) in 2020. In 2019, an exhibition titled “Packaging Matters: Singapore's Food Packaging Story from the Early 20th Century” was presented by National Museum of Singapore. Meanwhile, according to Fuchsia Dunlop (2014), in recent years, China has developed a new passion for food museums, and such excitement has spawned a crop of new museums all about food, for example, opened in 2012, the Hangzhou’s Cuisine Museum is one of a growing number

of food museums in Zhejiang Province that fully funded by the city government to promote gastro-diplomacy.

*The concept of the food-themed exhibition might sound new, yet the relationship between “Food and Museum” is certainly not a new phenomenon. Since 1985, the world’s first food museum – the Alimentarium Food Museum was established in Switzerland to showcase a global and independent view of the many aspects of the human diet (AFM, 2020). Meanwhile, over the last three decades, many countries had also devoted much appreciation to the food culture in their museums. AS reported by Maria Lotfi (2019), currently, there are various types of food and beverage museums around the world, and these museums did not merely educate people about the food’s history and culture, yet they also bring a pleasant experience to visitors as food always makes people happy. Joey Haverford (2019) also mentioned that food museums from over the world emphasizing different themes, and each museum focuses on a certain food or kind of food to delve into its respective world. Thusly, each food museum has its distinctive uniqueness and specialness.*

*Currently, there are lists and directories of best food museums around the world made available by experts in the field as references for visitors. For instance, in 2015, Tamara Hinson (CNN Travel Journalist) reported the world’s top food Museums to visit as follow, Colman’s Mustard Shop and Museum (United Kingdoms), York’s Chocolate Story (England), Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum (Japan), Udon Museum (Japan), Frietmuseum (Bruges, Belgium), Dutch Cheese Museum (Netherlands), Kimchi Museum (South Korea), Currywurst Museum (Germany), Southern Food and Beverage Museum (United States), Canadian Potato Museum (Canada), and Museum of Olive Oil Production (Greece). In 2018, National Geographic as well listed the world’s top ten museums dedicated to food and beverage as follow, the Bramah Museum of Tea and Coffee (England), Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate (Belgium), Alimentarium (Switzerland), Colman’s Mustard Shop and Museum (United Kingdoms), Museo del Peperoncino (Italy), Pick Salami and Szeged Paprika Museum (Hungary), Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum (Japan), Ben & Jerry’s Museum (United States), World of Coca-Cola (United States), and Museum of Bread Culture (Germany). Yet, no matter one’s agreed or not with these selections, the agreement upon the fact that these museums are significant establishments that delve into the history, culture, art and technological development of food culture around the world is unquestionable.*

By and large, food museums and exhibitions celebrate food, exploring its history, heritage, and cultural influence. Following the establishment of the world's first food museum in 1985, in this day and age, an enormous number of food-oriented museums have been developed over the world. As concluded by Tove Danovich (2015), food museums is now a worldwide phenomenon, and the age of the food museum is clearly upon us.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOOD MUSEUMS IN ASIA**

Oishimaya Sen Nag (2019), as a home to some of the world's oldest civilizations. Asia has a vast wealth of historical and archaeological treasures that are protected and exhibited in many museums distributed in its many countries. Meanwhile, with its richness and diversity of dietary culture, it is not surprising to learn that the world's food-oriented museums' fascination has been well celebrated by people living in this continent. Historical research has shown that, established in 1986, Museum Kimchikan or the Kimchi Field Museum located in Seoul, South Korea is currently one of the oldest food museums in the world. The museum is a well-known cultural and educational center dedicated to preserve and promote kimchi culture, and its exhibition features the historical and cultural significance of kimchi in Korean culture and gastronomy (Museum Kimchikan, 2020). In 2002, Tteok Museum (Korean Rice Cakes Museum) is another food museum that opened in Seoul to celebrate Korean culinary heritage.

Lucy Dayman (2017), given to Japanese serious love for dietary, it should not be surprising to know that Japan is the food museum capital of Asia. Currently, there are at least 14 food-oriented museums in Japan, namely Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum (Yokohama), Cup Noodle Museum (Yokohama and Osaka), Kewpie Mayo Museum (Tokyo), Shimizu Sushi Museum (Shizuoka), Fake Food Museum (Tokyo and Yokohama), Kirin Beer Village (Yokohama), the Sapporo Beer Museum (Hokkaido), Tottori Nijisseiki Pear Museum (Kurayoshi), New Ginger Museum (Tochigi Prefecture), Odaiba Takoyaki Museum (Tokyo), Hakutsuru Sake Brewery Museum (Kobe), Food and Agriculture Museum (Tokyo), and etc. In sum, Japan's thriving food culture has been the catalyst for foods museum boom throughout the country in recent decades. Meanwhile, in Taiwan, many food museums have been established over the years. Generally, the Yilan Distillery Chia Chi Lan Wine Museum in Yilan City (opened in 1998) is recognized as the oldest food museum in Taiwan. From 2000 to present, there are at least 7 food-oriented museums have been established in Taiwan,

namely, Wu Tao Chishang Lunch Box Cultural History Museum in Taitung opened in 2002, Taiwan Salt Museum in Tainan opened in 2002, Teng Feng Fish Ball Museum located in Tamsui opened in 2004, Spring Onion Culture Museum in Yilan opened in 2005, Taiwan Sugar Museum in Kaohsiung opened in 2006, Kuo Yuan Ye Museum of Cake and Pastry in Taoyuan City opened in 2011, and Taiwan Mochi Museum in Nantou City opened in 2011.

In addition to Japan and Taiwan, the mainland China has also developed a strong enthusiasm in developing food museums. As reported by Fuchsia Dunlop (2014), many new museums concerning food culture and culinary arts are opening in the mainland China, for example, the Hangzhou's Cuisine Museum is currently one of the most outstanding food museums that fully funded by the city government to promote China's gastro-diplomacy. Meanwhile, since 2011, Chengdu in Sichuan province has been honored as a city of gastronomy by UNESCO. A such, Chengdu Sichuan Cuisine Museum has been given a very significant roles to preserve and promote Sichuan Cuisine. In 2005, Hong Kong also welcomed its first food museum, the Tao Heung Foods of Mankind Museum in Fan Ling (the museum was relocated to Shatin in 2008). In 2018, the **first culinary museum of Indian was established in Manipal** by WGSHA educational institution to showcase the beauty and greatness of Indian food culture. In 2015, Wonder Food Museum was opened in Penang, Malaysia as the first and only food museum in Southeast Asia.

*In summary, among the countries in Asia, South Korea is the country with the oldest food museum established in 1986. Japan is the country with the highest number of food museums, and Taiwan is another state that many food museums have established in the last two decades. Apart from these two leading states, *mainland China is catching up with an expansion of food museums to showcase its affluent food culture and heritage. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is the only country with a food museum established in 2015.**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of the research, the qualitative research method is employed to obtain the picture of food museum phenomenon and the development of Wonder Food Museum. Data collection was gathered through both primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources included key informants' interview and researcher's on field observation. Secondary data sources mainly covered academic journals, government document, and newspaper

articles related to food museum phenomena in Asia. For primary data collection, two research instruments have been utilized: (1) participant observation (2) Semi-structure Interview.

(1) Participant observation. According to Barbara B. Kawulich (2005), participant observation, over the years, has been a hallmark of both anthropological and sociological types of research. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (2016) also mentioned that observation as the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study. In brief, observation as a data collection instrument supports the researcher to catalog, penetrate and analyze existing situations. Therefore, to learn about the operation and atmosphere of the museum, participant observations have been undertaken by the researcher at the museum during his visit in September and November 2019. Meanwhile, an informal discussion with groups of visitors was also been put into effect to obtain visitors' opinions of their experience at the museum.

(2) Semi-structure Interview - Shazia Jamshed (2014) describes the interview as one of the most common formats of data collection in qualitative research, and this data collection method serves as a type of framework in which the practices and standards are not only recorded but also achieved, challenged and as well as reinforced. M. Easwaramoorthy and Fataneh Zarinpoush (2005) also defined interviews as data collection methods when there is a need to collect in-depth information on people's opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings. For this the reason, on April 10, 2020, a qualitative interview has been organized to collect primary data to realize the research objectives. A semi-structured interview was conducted through Skype conference meetings with two key informants. A set of predetermined questions concerning the planning, development and current situation of the museum have been instrumented to collect primary research data from (i) Mr. Sean Lau (Museum Founder and Director), and (ii) Ms. Cheryl Ng (Co-founder of the Museum).

For secondary data collection, with the advent of the Internet, secondary data collection has been undertaken through online platforms. Sources of secondary data related to food museum development in Asia and Malaysia include books, journal, newspaper article, and website have been identified and accessed to generate a deeper and wider scope of understanding of the research subject.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Wonder Food Museum, Penang, Malaysia

The Wonder Food Museum is located in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. It was a private museum established in November 21, 2015. Situated inside Georgetown's *colonial architecture built in the 1940s*, the museum is the only one of its kind in the world that *celebrates diverse Asia dietary*. Meanwhile, with a focus on showcasing Malaysia's food culture, the museum is a great place to discover Malaysian *culinary heritage*. According to Sean Lau (Museum Founder and Director), Wonder Food Museum's mission is to document, preserve, and promote Malaysia's unique food culture which reflects the multiculturalism of the nation. Meanwhile, the Museum's additional, yet not lesser mission is to research, exhibit, and publicize the rich culinary heritage of Asia for the benefit of local residents and international visitors. In sum, Wonder Food Museum is a new kind of museum in Malaysia that delicate to showcase Malaysia's food culture with exhibits that allow visitors to "plean" (play + learn) with. It is an "edutainment" museum that incorporates elements of entertainment and interactivity into its exhibitions to maximize visitors' experiences. As said by Sean Lau, "Wonder Food Museum is a food museum plus wonderland that aims to provide a rich educational experience on food culture, and inspire creativity and curiosity within every individual."



Figure 1: Wonder Food Museum (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

Although still fairly new to the museum scene, Wonder Food Museum has *achieved a great milestone* in its development. Currently, the museum is recognized as one of the 10 outstanding museums in Malaysia by culturaltrip.com in 2017 and listed among the top 7

Museums in Malaysia by traveltriangle.com in 2019. Meanwhile, in 2017, the museum has been awarded the “Top Museum (Unique Concept) Award” by the INPenang International Awards. In 2019, another honor was granted by INPenang International Awards to celebrate the museum as “Best Tourism (Museum)” in Penang, Malaysia. Furthermore, since 2017 to present, the museum has also been selected as the recipient of the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence for three consecutive years. Undeniably, the Wonder Food Museum has now one of the most celebrated museums in Malaysia.

### **The Museum’s Location**

George Town, the capital city of the state of Penang is the third most populous city in Malaysia (Usman Haji Yaakob & Nik Norliati Fitri Md Nor, 2013). In 2008, the historical core of George Town was honored by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. For decades, George Town has been one of the most well-known destinations of cultural heritage tourism in Malaysia, and a top travel destination in Asia (CNN Travel, 2017). In recent years, the city has also been listed by various publications as a great destination for culinary tourism. For instance, Lonely Planet placed Penang as No.1 food destination in the world in 2014, the Culture Trip named Penang as one of the best 15 cities in the world for food in 2016, and CNN Travel recommends Penang as one of the greatest street food cities in 2017. With these international accolades, the city is now one of the popular destinations of culinary tourism in Asia.

As George Town’s earned its reputation as a gastronomic paradise, and well-known for its multicultural heritage. Sean Lau sees the town as a perfect location for the food museum. After attentive research on location, Lebuhr Pantai of George Town is considered a strategic location for Wonder Food Museum. Housed in a distinctive colonial architecture built in the 1940s, the museum is neighbor with many popular attractions, such as Georgetown UNESCO Historic Site, Pinang Peranakan Mansion, and Penang Little India. In brief, the museum is centrally *located* and easily *accessible* for visitors.



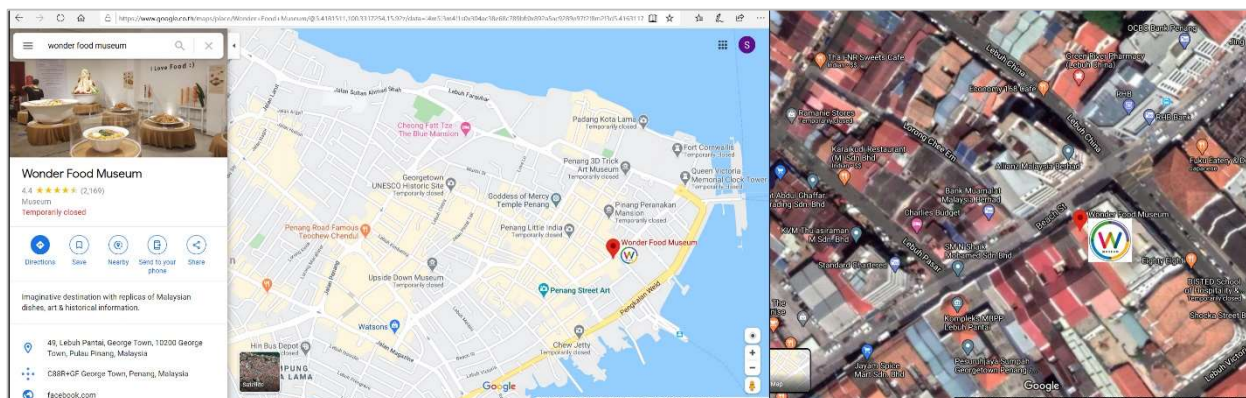


Figure 2: Location of Wonder Food Museum (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

### The Museum's curatorial concept

According to Sean Lau, the idea of opening a food museum was conceived in 2012, yet to make Wonder Food Museum become a reality is a challenging journey. It took the team nearly four years to overcome all challenges and have the museum opened in November 2015. The first and the biggest challenge was, there is no food museum in Malaysia and neighboring countries to serve as a reference, and most of the food museums the team has research and learn about did not able to satisfy their interest. As such, to arrive with the concept of a “wonderland” comes only after months of research and discussion. As said by the co-founder, Cheryl Ng “we want to position this museum as a food wonderland for visitors to engage and enjoy their visit, it is a participating museum that engage visitors in both mental and physical interaction. Therefore, the overall exhibition design and exhibits production are centered around the wonderland’s curatorial concept, and title the museum Wonder Food Museum”.

### The Museum's exhibits

All hyper-realistic replica foods exhibited in the museum are handcrafted by the creative team led by Cheryl Ng, who was trained professionally in the art of “shokuhin sampuru”. As said by Cheryl Ng, “my role as the leader of exhibits production is to lead the team to create the most hyper-realistic replica foods with the highest-level of deliciousness. It took the team nearly two years to research and produce close to 200 types of exhibits”.



Figure 3: Wonder Food Museum's exhibits production (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

Shokuhin sampuru (food sample), a widespread Japanese art of replica foods was invented by Takizo Iwasaki and Suzu in 1932 (Iwasaki Co., Ltd., 2011). Since then, the culture of using Shokuhin sampuru has become a popular practice by many Japanese restaurants to display their signatures' dishes on shop windows to attract customers. Today, as times have changed, the roles of replica foods have evolved from just dish samples for restaurant promotion to art that pursuit of reality. As reported by Jared Lubarsky in the *New York Times* (1985), the craftsmanship of replica foods has been raised to an art form. Japanese plastic food models by the Maizuru Company were exhibited at London's Victoria and Albert Museum in 1980. Meanwhile, in addition to its traditional roles, replica foods are also being used in many ways, for instance, decoration display for restaurants and grocery, props for movies, television shows, and theatrical plays. In the 20th century, models of foods and dishes were also used for nutrition education and consumer research (Tamara Bucher et al., 2012). In brief, over the years, replica foods have developed from being fake foods made from plastic, silicone, and resin. They are now cultural artifacts with a global presence that developed alongside with Japanese gastro-diplomacy.

### **The Museum's exhibition design**

For exhibition and gallery design, Sean Lau mentions that *the exhibition team* developed the exhibition design planning alongside exhibits production. Based on the curatorial concept of a wonderland, the museum's exhibition is divided into three different zones, namely (1) Info Zone, (2) Wow Zone, and (3) Educational Zone.

(1) Info Zone, the space is dedicated to showcasing Malaysia multiculturalism through the nation's vibrant food culture. More than 100 types of Malaysian foods are exhibited with a highlight of presenting traditional food from Malays, Indians, Chinese and Baba Nyonya

culture. In short, the Info Zone is a gateway to the food wonderland with a grand presentation of Malaysia's culinary heritage.



Figure 4: Info Zone's exhibition (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

(2) Wow Zone is where the "food wonderland" and its fantasy takes place. Different sections such as 'Multi-colored foods', 'Colorless foods', 'Weightless foods', and 'Giant displays' are designed to stimulate visitors' interaction with foods. For instance, under the giant display section, Malaysia's well-known dishes such as Cendol, Laksa, Curry Mee, Rojak, Char Kuey Teow and etc were made in a gigantic size to excite visitors and challenge their perceptions about foods.



Figure 5: Wow Zone's exhibition (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

(3) Educational Zone, this zone aims to bring together the politics and pleasure of foods, and proposed questions to raise visitors' awareness of food's production, consumption, and environmental sustainability. Thereupon, at the end of the visit, an image of a helpless child crouched over leftover food on the floor against a red backdrop with the message, "Food is precious, don't waste" is the highlight of the educational zone."





Figure 6: Educational Zone's exhibition (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

By and large, the Info Zone is devoted to showcasing the wonder of Malaysia's cultural diversity through its food heritage. The Wow Zone is a food wonderland designed to inspire visitors' participation, and the Educational Zone is dedicated as the zone of enlightenment.

### **An interactive museum**

Andrew Pekarik et al. (2002), in recent years, museum visitors have come to expect a high level of interactivity in museum exhibitions, especially non-art exhibitions [Kalina Nedelcheva](#) (2019) also describes that, interactive exhibitions have the power to pull the audience closer to artworks and created a more memorable experience. Museums with interactive exhibition design are now in the trend. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that many museums nowadays integrate interactivity into their exhibition design. The *interactive* exhibit is a hit, yet the interactivities and interactive design are an open-ended concept, the conceptualization and practice of an interactive exhibition have therefore been interpreted differently accordingly to one's exhibition design objective. For instance, an interactive exhibition could be spaces with exhibits designed to encourages visitor's physical participation. It could also be an exhibition with a physical or virtual presentation that involved multi-sensory interactive design. In sum, interactive exhibitions blurred and blended the fine line between education and entertainment experience in a dynamic way. It is a change that shifted the global museum practices (ShawHong Ser, 2019).

According to Sean Lau, "exhibitions nowadays have moved away from the passive display to dynamic edutainment installation. Therefore, a museum with a physical interactive design is what interests him. Consequently, a food museum with a wonderland's theme that engaged visitors' in series physical interactions was designed as specialness of Wonder Food Museum". As a museum embraces the idea of interactive exhibitions, in each zone's

exhibition, there are exhibits for display, and exhibits serve as “prop” to bridge visitor’s engagement. For instance, in Wow Zone, visitors are allowed to “play” with exhibits, it is an exhibition area that stimulates visitors’ participation through the freedom to create and explore. In addition to physical interaction design, exhibits and spatial planning of the museum have also been designed as a kind of “Pop-up Museum” to cater to visitors’ interest, particularly on young audiences’ passion for the selfie phenomenon. According to Manuel Charr (2019), millennials are new generation that constantly searching out the perfect selfie moment and cultural experiences to enrich their social media feeds. With such a change in the contemporary cultural landscape, the concept of pop-up museums is growing popular worldwide. Emre Cetin (2019) also mentioned that pop-up museums as interactive and “Instagrammable” creative spaces are becoming a new phenomenon.



Figure 7: Interactive exhibition design at Wonder Food Museum (Sources: Wonder Food Museum)

Compared with the “no photo” policy of the traditional museums due to art-works’ protection and copyrights issue. The pop-up museum engages visitors to experience and have their photos taken and share on social media. With such a feature in its nature, a pop-up museum’s concept has been integrated into overall exhibition planning of Wonder Food Museum. As said by Sean Lau, “to ensure our exhibition is able to stimulate visitors’ intellectually and emotionally, we engage their interests through a series of physical interaction design. Moreover, the exhibition’s interactivity is not limited to physical interaction, a cross-cultural content interaction, as well as presentation in interactives, have also be implemented”. By and large, Wonder Food Museum is an interactive museum that requiring visitors’ involvement in activities that will maximize their visit. The museum offers freedom of navigation in their visit by allowing visitors to explore information to match their interests. It is

a museum that combines innovative formats and playful activities in its overall exhibition concept.

### **The development of Wonder Food Museum (2015 – present)**

According to Cheryl Ng, since its opening to present, the museum received positive feedback from the public and the media. In term of visitor numbers, from 2015 to present, it shows a *steady growth* of *visitor* arrivals each year. In 2015, the museum welcomed nearly 5,000 visitors in the first month of its operation. In the following year, the museum received a total number of 90,000 visitors. With around 30% in visitor number increment annually. In 2017, the number of visitors increased to 110,000, in 2018, the museum received 140,000 visitors, and in 2019, 170,000 visitors have visited the museum. In terms of visitor profile, the museum *visitors consist* of local and international *tourists from different age groups and demographic cohorts*. Yet, the number of millennials visitor is the highest. As a private museum, the sustainability of the Wonder Food Museum is heavily dependent on the museum ticket sell. In the past five years, with stable growth in visitor numbers, the museum is able to sustain its operation, and hopefully, such growth will be continued to ensure the long-term development of the museum.

Cheryl Ng also mentioned that most visitors were satisfied with their visit, and provide positive feedback by sharing their pictures and comments on social media. Meanwhile, many local and international bloggers have also written interesting articles about the museum. Moreover, the story of Wonder Food Museum has also been widely reported by local media as well as media in overseas such as CCTV in China, Dong Seng News channel in Taiwan, and other TV programs in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Hong Kong, Russia, South Korea and USA. In addition to the many accomplishments mentioned above, in 2019, the museum has *achieved another great milestone* in its development. The Wonder Food Museum as a “brand” was franchise to China, Thusly, the very first overseas Wonder Food Museum was established at Kulangyu Island in Xia Men. This success is unprecedented in the history of museum in Malaysia.

In sum, although as a small and young museum, the Wonder Food Museum is a museum with great accomplishment. Currently as one of the most celebrated museums in Malaysia, the museum is considering doing well in its overall development, particularly on its



achievement in contributing new ideas and perspectives to museum tourism development in Malaysia.

### **Areas to be improved for the Museum**

Arrived in 2020, and a whole lot is changing in the museum industry. Museums need to determine how they fit into the fast-changing museum environment and anticipate the changing expectations of their visitor and member base. At this moment, the Wonder Food Museum no doubt is doing well, however, looking to the present and the future, here are four aspects for the management team to take notice of to ensure the ongoing success of the museum, (1) Museum website, (2) Museum's membership programs, (3) Museum education programs, (4) Museum Shop and souvenirs development.

### **Museum website**

Raubi Marie Perilli (2019), small business seems to be believed that a Facebook page is enough for an online presence, however, the truth is, a great small business website is the best channel to showcase business venture. Currently, the official communication channels of the museum are mainly relying on its Facebook page and **Instagram**. These two channels are no doubt a workable platform for the museum's marketing and promotional related activities. However, an official website (with its own IP address) is still needed to position the museum with a more professional outlook and enhance the museum's branding. Moreover, in today's *competitive digital marketing landscape*, it is very important to build a professional website to showcase the museum's credibility and gain full control over its online destiny.

### **Museum membership programs**

The best visitor is one who becomes a member. Therefore, to build perennial visitors and long-term memberships is an important strategy that cannot be overlooked by any museums. For the Wonder Food Museum, to develop a membership program is another significant mission that needs to be realized. The museum needs to build up a strong community that can contribute to the museum's sustainability. Most substantially, the membership program is not merely to generate financial support for the museum, it is also an effective channel to cultivate museum's ambassadors who will spread the word about the

exhibitions and programs they love and brings even more visitors and potential members to the museum.

### **Museum Education programs**

Apart from the museum accomplishment in promoting Malaysia culinary heritage and food culture, and contribute to museum tourism. The role of the museum in education is another aspect that requires the museum management team to pay attention to. Other than the permanent exhibition and scheduled education tour. There is a lot more need to done to enrich the museum's education programs. For instance, education programs or activities such as special exhibition, public lectures on food culture, culinary heritage, and local history might be a good initiation to consider. Furthermore, cooking workshops or classes that involve local community participation will be another possibility to grow the museum's educational programs as well as interesting outreach activities for audiences' development.

### **Museum Shop and souvenirs development**

According to Micaela Marini Higgs (2018), gift shops contributing up to as much as a quarter of museum revenue, and yet their contributions are not merely economic. These retail zones are also helping to educate visitors, build the museum's brand, and sometimes serve a highlight of museums. For the case of the Wonder Food Museum, the museum's gift corner and souvenir items are sections that need to be improved. Ideally, unique souvenirs inspired by the museum's collections or Penang's history should be available, this will contribute to the museum's unique destination offer.

### **CONCLUSION**

Food museum, as the name suggests, is a museum dedicated to preserve and present the history, culture, and evolution of human dietary. For instance, the official mission of the world's oldest food Museum - "the Alimentarium Food Museum" is to create and develop a museum in Vevey of human food around the world, and contribute to awakening public interest in past and present issues concerning human food (Alimentarium Food Museum, 2020). Currently, there are dozens of specialized *food museums* opened *throughout the world*, and thematic museums and exhibitions centered around different food cultures are increasingly popular since the early millennium. In 2015, the first food museum celebrates

Malaysia's food culture and culinary heritage - "Wonder Food Museum" was established in Penang. Based on the curatorial concept of "food wonderland" and interactive exhibition design approaches, the museum takes its collections to celebrate Malaysia's multicultural foodscape. At the moment, as the first of its kind museum in Malaysia, the museum has then become one of the nation's most celebrated museums, particularly by millennials visitor.

By and large, as a young museum dedicated to preserve and promote Malaysia's food culture and culinary heritage to the world, the Wonder Food Museum's achievements are remarkable. However, to ensure the museum's sustainability in the dynamically shifting museum and tourism environment, there is still a lot of work to be done to continue its success. As concluded by Sean Lau (Museum Founder and Director), "the management team acknowledges on limitation and challenges of the museum, yet the team will work strategically to ensure the sustainable development of the museum". Hopefully, the Wonder Food Museum's success story will be continued and keeps its special fascination for visitors from all around the world.

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