

**TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION VERSUS SUCCESSFUL  
DESTINATIONS  
CASE STUDY: LANGKAWI ISLAND**

**Jamil Jusoh & Badaruddin Mohamed**  
School of Housing, Building & Planning  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia.

**ABSTRACT**

Malaysian government has been spending more than US\$6 million from its annual budget every year for tourism promotion. Since tourism has been identified as the second most important sector of the economy after manufacturing, nearly 30% of the budget allocation is channeled towards physical development, providing infrastructure and services. Compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia stands amongst top countries in term of providing a first class tourist infrastructure. Apart from this huge allocation, nonstop promotion and high government incentives for the tourist operators, the arrival of international tourists to Malaysia cannot be considered encouraging enough and tourist activities are slowing down. Why do this happen? Are these the results of poor and insufficient provision of tourism products? Does promotion and marketing strategy implemented by the tourism-related sector not fulfilling the required information and drives needed by the tourist markets? Why are other South-East Asian countries could prosper despite having limited financial resources and substandard infrastructure facilities? All these questions will be answered in this paper.

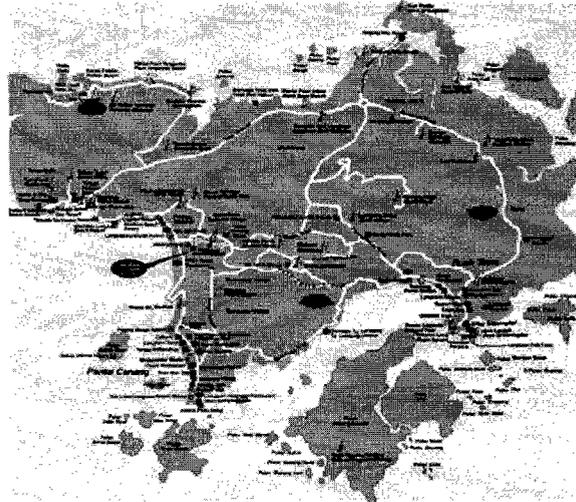
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**LANGKAWI – INTRODUCTION**

Langkawi, "The Island of Legend" is located between Sumatra and Western Thailand. It is at the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia. Comprising a group of 104 islands, the biggest being Langkawi, it is a place for those seeking tranquility and refuge from the hustle and bustle of city life. So powerful is its charm on visitors that many have returned to the island time and again.

- a) Total land area is 47,848 hectares(478.48 sq. km)
- b) There are only three islands that are inhabited.
- Langkawi Island (65,202 sq.km)
- Dayang Bunting Island (501 sq. km)
- Tuba Island (3,894 sq.km)

Most of the development is in the main town of Kuah and in isolated beach resorts around the coast. The airport is located on this island as well hotel resorts, restaurants and shops. The two main beaches, Pantai Cenang and Pantai Kok, are on the island's western coast, with Pantai Cenang being the most popular as the venue for hotels and restaurants. Dotted along the northern coast are the more luxurious resorts.



Map of Langkawi

### **LANGKAWI IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NORTHERN GROWTH TRIANGLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

The Northern Growth Triangle Development Project, or the Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), is a newly proposed area for regional economic co-operation among three of the seven members of the ASEAN countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. This project proposes a growth triangle compassing northern Sumatra in Indonesia, the four northern western states of Peninsular Malaysia (Perak, Penang, Kedah and Perlis) and Southern Thailand. The Northern Growth triangle promotes its aspiration by focusing on its efforts on eight areas of economic co-operation, namely, agriculture, fishing, livestock, tourism, trade and commerce, industry, infrastructure and human resources. The most important forces, which will influence the realization of this co-operation within the Northern Growth triangle, are a shared common race, religion and culture.

### **WHY LANGKAWI'S INFRASTRUCTURE IS GIVEN ATTENTION?**

Infrastructure in Langkawi is equal to those in the active economic area in Malaysia even though this island is still early to move and need development boost to develop. Among the main reasons why Langkawi is given priorities are:

- a) Special interest of the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir towards the island whom he perceived as a "golden child" and as the main tourism center of the northern region of Malaysia. Major developments on the island are carefully scrutinized by the PM himself who is known to ask for briefings from developers as well as visiting construction sites to ensure sustainable development is practiced to protect the island's serene and green beauty.
- b) Since independence till early 1980s, Langkawi is still known as a legendary island which cannot be "touched" because of its history and heritage value which need to be sustained. Now it has become world standard tourism island which need first class infrastructure.
- c) Langkawi need to develop an appropriate standard not only as a tourism centre but also as a centre of economic activities and international management because of its position in IMT-GT.

## **LADA'S ROLE AS IMPLEMENTATION AGENCY FOR LANGKAWI'S DEVELOPMENT**

In 1990, the Federal Government set up the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) to develop the island as a tourist destination, as well as to improve the socio-economic standard of the local people. Langkawi's development is spelt out in the Langkawi 5 Year Development Plan. The strategy is a combination between inland development such as providing new facilities, and preserving the development of the coastal area, as tourism continues to lead as the island's key economic sector. LADA's responsibilities cover improvements in water and electricity supply infrastructure, road networks, airport facilities, housing, and tourist attractions. The main development activities are currently located in the main towns of Kuah (the sea gateway to the island, Padang Matsirat (the air gateway) and Padang Lalang. The coastal locations identified for development are at Kuah, Pantai Cenang, Pantai Tengah, Pantai Kok/Telok Burau, Telok Datai and Tanjung Rhu.

### **MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC FACILITIES**

#### **a) The Road System**

Almost 95% of the island's area is covered with roads. The road's standard is of **first class** with the main route connecting tourism and commercial centers. These areas can be connected to the "in and out" gateways to the island. Among the main land routes are Langkawi Airport- Kuah town, Kuah - Pantai Chenang dan Kuah - Tanjung Rhu. These routes are connecting routes between Jetty- Bandar Kuah - Pantai Chenang - Langkawi Airport and indirectly connects all the important destinations in the island. Not even a single tourism destination in this island is not connected with tar roads and it is supported by natural landscape which is beautiful and expensive.

#### **b) The International Airport Langkawi**

- A major development of the Airport started in 1985. Further improvements to the terminal building, parking apron and taxiway were made in 1991 to enable the island to be the venue for the biennial International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA).
- Major renovations costing RM90 million were completed in 1995 to cater to the large number travelers, arrival and departure halls, 22 duty free concessionaires and a car park, which can accommodate 500.
- The renovation of the airport was justified based in the rapid increase of passenger movement from 17,359 to 888,291 over a 8 years period since 1987. This airport can now cater to 1,000 pph (passenger peak hour) two ways as compared to just 400 pph previously.
- Langkawi Airport was the first that was built and managed by Malaysia Airports Berhad. The KLIA Sepang was constructed based on the same infrastructural concept as Langkawi Airport.

#### **c) The Ferry Services**

Langkawi can be accessed by air and sea. In the north, it can be accessed from Kuala Perlis Jetty which is 30 km from Southern Thailand. This route can accommodate tourists from all over Malaysia and other Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Philipines. Tourists can also access to Langkawi from Penang which will take two hours by the sea route. Systematic ferry services and good carrying capacity despite in peak seasons is another added advantage to the transport infrastructure services in this island.

**d) The Harbour and Jetty Facilities**

Jetty and harbour facilities is more into providing access to the island for domestic and international tourist. It is not suprising that the jetty and harbour is built with high qualities and standards. Besides having jetty for tourist's boats, there are also jetty for exclusive boats in private harbours. Kuah is the harbour and jetty for tourists while Tasek Ewa is the harbour for cargo ships.

**MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EVENTS OF LANGKAWI**

The Government has nurtured the island as a venue for major regional and international exhibitions and shows. Today, the island has the 7,500 sq feet Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre, and all the international hotels on the island have meeting and/or convention facilities. Langkawi is fast emerging as an international sports venue. Good infrastructure, hospitality, safety and other factors contributes to the development of this place as a favorite venue. Among the events organised are:

- Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) - since 1991 Bi-Annual event.
- Langkawi Accommodation for Visiting Academics (LAVA)
- Langkawi Internatioan Festival of Arts (LIFA) - Bi-Annual event.
- Ironman Triathlon Competitions - since 1999 annual event.
- International Cycling Competition (Le Tour de Langkawi) - Annual event.
- Indy 40 Enduro Prime Minister's Cup (Go-Kart Racing) - annual event.
- Langkawi International Dialogue - every alternate year.
- Sailing Competition's (Langkawi Regatta) - annual event.
- 16th Pelangi Cup International Golf Open Championship 2006
- Langkawi International Water Festival 2006

Le Tour de Langkawi, based on the renowned Le Tour de France, is the foremost international cycling event in the region. An eagerly attended event is the biennial LIMA (Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition). Langkawi is also fast gaining recognition as a preferred MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) destination. With its superb infrastructure, Langkawi is competitively and appealingly ahead of other venues in the region.

**LANGKAWI OFFER A FIRST CLASS RESORTS AND HOTELS AND RECREATIONAL PRODUCT**

Langkawi is well known among the tourists and hotel guests for its first class service facilities. Even though it has been 20 years since it was declared as a Duty Free Port, various 1st class accommodation is provided. The question that arise now is; is these facilities used only by the foreign tourists only while the domestic tourists have to go for the accommodation they can afford? There are more than 10 luxurious resorts and 25 middle cost resorts and budget chalets in Langkawi which also provides supporting facilities as below:

- a) Medical Services
- b) Transport and Tour services
- c) Recreation and sport facilities
- d) Business and Financial Centre
- e) Conferences and Events

Billions were spent to develop the Underwater World at Pantai Cenang, the Langkawi Coral Reef platform at Pulau Payar Marine Park, and the Crocodile farm. Another Langkawi's

biggest resort development project, is the RM 1 billion Floating Village at Kuala Muda in Padang Matsirat . The government expected the provision of more than 7,5000 hotel rooms by 2006.

## **HIGH INVESTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE VERSUS MARKETABLE TOURISM PRODUCT : UNSOLVED ISSUES**

High investment is made by the Malaysian government to increase Langkawi's standard as a World Tourism Island Destination. With so much of modern infrastructure and public facilities, it seems that the vision of this tourism island can be sustain over thousand of years even though there are mixture of original product and man made product. However, comparison between Malaysia and other Asean countries looks like Malaysia is fear of left behind in this popular tourism sector. Several issues have been identified in this scenario:

### **Issue 1: Low Demand Despite High Quality and More Infrastructure Facilities**

Even though there are various facilities components such as roads, public transports, jetty, ferry services and shopping areas, there are still lack in tourists coming in to the island except during celebration seasons and long school holidays. Transportation sector is important in Langkawi but has few problems as listed below:

- a) There are only few bus routes in Langkawi with no other alternatives for the tourists. Buses ply the route from the jetty to the center of town and passengers are charged for each way.
- b) The road in Langkawi is well-maintained and less traffic especially outside Kuah town.
- c) Public transport in Langkawi is largely provided by taxis. Taxis fares are priced based on the destination, not by meter. The tourists hve no alternative.
- d) Either cars or vans can be rented easily at Kuah Town or the beach resorts. However the fares are too high for local tourist.

### **Issue 2: Entrance Of Seasonal Tourist Increases Demand And Give Impact On Costs Increase**

Table 1: Incoming Tourist To Langkawi By Month (Local and Foreign)

YEAR 2004	TOTAL	YEAR 2005	TOTAL
	173,780	JANUARY	107,943
	159,238	FEBRUARY	133,136
	172,892	MARCH	142,205
	156,378	APRIL	120,478
	195,977	MAY	139,538
	207,961	JUNE	172,592
	165,284	JULY	152,100
	194,767	AUGUST	174,504
	157,079	SEPTEMBER	151,221
	130,756	OCTOBER	101,720
	185,401	NOVEMBER	198,734
	280,136	DECEMBER	238,049
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,179,269</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,835,245</b>

Source: Statistics from LADA, 2005.

Tourist's entrance to the island only depends on domestic tourists with limitation during school holidays or celebration holidays. Research shows that over flood of domestic tourists is convergent in 3 main months which are April, August and December which is also school holiday months. Foreign tourists comes in during the month of June until September which is during summer holidays in Europe. Higher demand in several sectors by desperate consumers, for instance accommodation, food, transportation and shopping creates opportunities for tourism operators to make fortune in a short time. Tourists receive low quality and substandard services due to shortage of time with lower efficient supplement.

### Issue 3 : High Tourism Expenses Create Negative Impacts On “ Return Traveler”

Hotel and food industry is convergent in ‘higher end’ businesses where the targeted customers are those of seasonal tourists group whom like to spend lavishly and less budget spending. Hotels and resorts in Pantai Cenang and Pantai Kok area have taken the advantage to increase the rooms rates especially during holiday seasons. Is there any price differences in rooms, food and transportation wise since Langkawi became Free Port in 1987 untill 20 years after that?

Table 2: Average expenditure For Each Tourist Per Day ( 2005)

Expenditure	Foreign Tourist		Local Tourist	
	RM	%	RM	%
Food	39.70	24.97	21.17	11.13
Lodging/hotel	70.10	44.10	50.40	27.20
Shopping	21.44	13.48	85.10	45.58
Transport	27.75	17.45	30.05	16.09
Total	158.99	100.00	186.72	100.00

Source: Technical Report:Tourism ,1988 LSP, and projection 2005

It is found that a foreign tourist in Langkawi have to spend an average of RM 159.00(USD 42.00) per day while domestic tourists have to spend RM 186.72(USD 48.000) per day. It means if a foreign tourist stays for a week, he will spend USD 294 . As for the domestic tourists, spending USD 336 is considered too high. This is due to traveling pattern among Malaysians which is ‘Family Tourism’.

Table 3: Selections of Accomodation By Tourist (2003) By Percentage

Type of Accomodation	Tourist Category		
	Local	Foreign	Total Tourist
High Class Hotel & Resort	24.6	35.3	27.0%
Medium Class (2 star and below)	8.2	23.5	11.5
Chalet & Budget Lodging	62.3	35.3	56.4
Hostel/ Domitary	4.9	5.9	5.2

Source: Langkawi Structure Plan 2004: Revised Edition

### Issue 4 : Heritage And Historical Tourism Product Is Fading And Not Preserved.

Even though Langkawi is known as the legendary island, unbalanced development with the capacity of this natural island to sustain is a worrying issue. Sustainable development is not practised. Infrastructure provided in sensitive areas is seen as important than preserving the beauty and structure of nature. Scenario in Phuket island and Koh Samui in Thailand is taken as a development trend in Langkawi. Even though the quality and total infrastructure and facilities provided is seen like for 50 years, the heritage and historical value is being destroyed and not taken into considerarion. ‘Replica’ for heritage and new identity is created to replace the natural genuine identity. Development costs for infrastructure such as roads, bridge, harbour and jetty is 10 times more than conserving and maintenance costs for the

historical sites in this island. Does Cambodia have the ability to built such a 'first highway' from Phom Penh to Siem Riap to connect their tourist to the world' famous Angkor Watt?

#### **Issue 5: Langkawi As Foreign Tourist's Transit To Thailand And Other Asean Countries**

South East Asia and other Asean countries are hot and new tourism destination in this 21st century. Virgin nature, unique and genuine historical product makes these destinations popular not only among Asean tourists but also to tourists from Europe, Middle East, Korea dan China. Even though Malaysia have world class destinations such as Pulau Tioman, Pulau Perhentian and Langkawi, it could not compete with uniqueness of Angkor Watt in Cambodia, Borubuddur in Indonesia and Historic City Of Ayuthia in Thailand. These situation makes Malaysia and Langkawi is used as 'transit' path by tourists from Europe through Singapore and stay in Langkawi for few days and continue their journey to Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Does Cambodia and Vietnam have 'first class' infrastructuer and facilities to support their tourism sector?

#### **CONCLUSION**

Is Langkawi ready to accommodate over flood of high quality, modern and good infrastructure when the tourism product provide is at low level . not attractive and not as good as those in other South East Asean countries ? Can Langkawi and Malaysia have their own standard and measurement of tourism scale to make sure its always at the top in providing infrastructure for tourism projects? Which one comes first and given priority? Infrastructure and facilities first and then tourism product or vice versa. Viewing from cost and implication aspects towards the tourism industry, Malaysia should consider whether high investment for infrastructure need to be implemented in Langkawi.

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