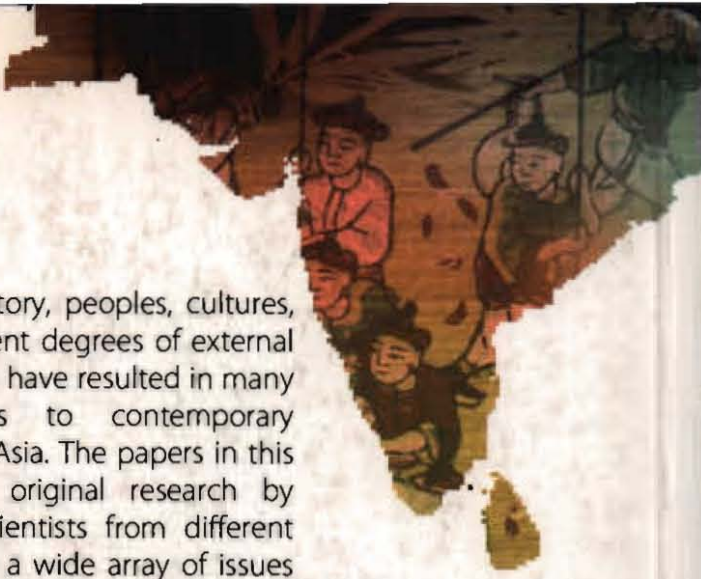




**CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN AN ERA  
OF GLOBALISATION**

*Edited by*  
**Kim-Chuan GOH**  
**SEKSON Yongvanit**



The mix of landscapes, history, peoples, cultures, political systems and different degrees of external influences and globalisation have resulted in many changes and challenges to contemporary development in Southeast Asia. The papers in this collection are based on original research by geographers and other scientists from different countries and they capture a wide array of issues that confront the region at the turn of the twenty first century. Their findings and discussions provide first-hand knowledge of this unique area, which have significant policy implications on the development of each of the countries these studies represent.

This volume should be of international interest and relevance to geography teachers and educators and other scientists who teach current development issues of Southeast Asia at high school and tertiary levels. It will also be a useful reference material to policy makers within the region who deal with decision making on the subjects examined by the authors.

**PEARSON**  
Education

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# **Change and Development in Southeast Asia in an Era of Globalisation**

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## **Rural Tourism in Malaysia: Towards Sustaining the Local Economy**

*FATIMAH Hassan, NURWATI Badarulzaman and KAUSAR Hj. Ali*

### **Introduction**

With the decline in agricultural productivity and other rural employment sectors, many rural areas worldwide have moved towards tourism as a strategy to boost their waning economy. A combination of factors has propelled the trend towards rural tourism including the anxieties of urban lifestyles, interests in cultural heritage and cultural roots, improved transportation and communication systems, increased environmental consciousness and nature appreciation. Such trends have brought about the concept of relaxing lifestyles in a village setting as an experience worth indulging. Rural tourism does not necessarily mean luxury and sophistication. Rather, it relates more to comfortable accommodation, beautiful landscape, authentic cultural, historical and architectural sites, and appropriate building preservation that meet the expectations of clientele whose profiles and characteristics may differ from the regular tourists. Delivering quality rural tourism essentially provides a competitive edge against conventional tourism. A balance should be struck between the needs of the visitors, the environment and local community to ensure the development of sustainable rural tourism. As such, adopting an ecological approach to rural tourism is commendable since it involves the visitors' active exchanges and interactions with both the living (hosts, services) and the non-living (landscape, sunshine) elements at the destination areas in experiencing a tourism product (Murphy 1991). The interdependency between these components produces an exchange of revenue, which, if properly managed could create a lucrative, renewable resource industry in the host areas that benefits the local populace. Based on these arguments, this paper highlights three case studies of rural tourism initiatives in the states of Kedah and Seberang Perai, Penang, Malaysia as well as their potentials as prime rural tourism destinations and an impetus for the local economy. Recommendations from this paper may assist the local authorities concerned in formulating sound development strategies in the rural regions of Malaysia.

## **Concept and Definition of Rural Tourism**

Several terms have been used interchangeably to describe tourism in the countryside, including rural tourism, agricultural tourism, eco-tourism, green tourism and agro-tourism. Rural tourism (the term used in this paper) involves travelling to and staying in the rural areas for leisure, business and other pursuits. Rural tourism espouses the rural culture as a key ingredient in the tourism product including personalised contacts, the experience of the physical and cultural environments, and participation in local community lifestyles (Cabrini 2002). Rural tourism comprises any form of tourism that showcases the rural lifestyles and folks that benefit the local community through mutual exchange and interaction. Rural tourism may be classified as (i) nature tourism, which consists mainly of recreational activities; (ii) cultural tourism, which is concerned with the local history and socio-cultural identity; (iii) eco-tourism, which pertains to the preservation of natural resources, community welfare and social values; (iv) village-based tourism, in which the villagers benefit economically from tourism activities; and (v) agro-tourism, whereby tourists participate in traditional agricultural practices of the host areas (Rattanasuwongchai 1998). Rural tourism also includes supplies and services such as accommodation, tours, events, festivities, outdoor recreation, as well as production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural produce. Climbing, riding, adventure tourism, educational travel, sport and health tourism, arts and heritage tourism are activities associated with rural tourism.

By definition, rural tourism excludes mass tourism activities in urban areas or other packed rural tourism areas and resorts. Areas of rural tourism are often sparsely populated with limited tourist accommodation facilities. All products and services purchased by visitors in the rural areas are considered part of rural tourism. Linked to the concepts of rural development and sustainable development, rural tourism is a form of sustainable tourism that exploits resources in the rural regions but with low ecological impact. Rural tourism is intrinsically sustainable, for it attracts small numbers of visitors with genuine interests in the local cultures and traditions. Both hosts and guests could interact, exchange views, and consequently establish mutual understanding. At the same time, the rural areas accrue benefits in terms of rural productivity, employment generation, wealth distribution, rural culture and environmental conservation, local participation and adaptation of traditional values. Strategies for rural tourism should be well orchestrated since the essence of rural tourism lies in active involvement of the tourists with the local community and authorities. A community-oriented, ecological approach to rural tourism is therefore essential, involving the interplay of major tourism components such as the environment, accessibility, economics, social, cultural and management considerations (Murphy 1991).

Rural tourism in its various forms has generated much interest across the globe. Rural tourism has been widely adopted as an approach to revive declining rural areas and to stimulate a sustainable rural future through job creation, farm support, nature conservation, rural supplies and services, landscape and nature conservation, rural arts and crafts, women empowerment, as well as an enhancement of heritage and patrimony (Rátz and Puczko 1998). Within the framework of an integrated rural development, rural tourism has overcome the potent image of mass tourism by offering supplementary incomes to rural families through the multiplier effects of high revenue generation and capital-output ratio. Several indicators have been used to measure sustainable rural tourism, including the number and ratio of visitors; list of natural/cultural attractions; existence of local/regional plan for tourism; area protection; local control; employment generation; education and training; energy consumption; waste management; and local and tourist satisfaction (Rátz and Puczko 1998).

However, since the demand for rural tourism is often seasonal, its economic profitability has generally fluctuated due to low occupancy rates and relatively high investments in tourist infrastructure. Other problems of rural tourism include poor management skills, poor marketing and infrastructure, and a lack of information on tourist demands and expectations. Nonetheless, with good planning and investment, tourism promises to be a lucrative income-generating alternative in the rural regions, when complemented and supported by other economic sectors, especially agriculture.

## **Overview of Rural Tourism in Malaysia**

Geographically, Malaysia comprises 14 states. With a population of about 25 million in 2004, Malaysia is one of the rapidly developing countries in Southeast Asia. Malaysia's GDP has been increasing at 7.0% per annum during 2001-2005 and such momentum is expected to continue. Malaysia's growth has been spearheaded by the tertiary sector, especially tourism, which has been increasing at 8% per annum. For Malaysia, as in many other countries, tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing sectors of the economy. According to the World Tourism Organisation, tourism has been a major source of foreign exchange earnings and a key employment generator in many countries worldwide.

Malaysia is one of the world's top tourism destinations during 1990-1998 (Table 1). Despite threats of SARS and terrorism, international tourist arrivals in Malaysia are expected to grow at 7.5% per annum to reach 36 million by 2020.

Table 1: World's Top Tourism Destinations (1990-1998)

Rank by Year			Countries	Tourist Arrivals (‘000)	% Change 1997-1998	% Total 1998
1990	1995	1998				
1	1	1	France	70,000	4.7	11.2
3	3	2	Spain	47,743	10.0	7.6
2	2	3	USA	47,127	-1.3	7.5
4	4	4	Italy	34,829	2.2	5.6
7	5	5	UK	25,475	-0.2	4.1
12	8	6	China	24,000	1.0	3.8
8	7	7	Mexico	19,300	-0.3	3.1
27	9	8	Poland	18,820	-3.6	3.0
10	11	9	Canada	18,659	7.9	3.0
6	10	10	Austria	17,282	3.8	2.8
9	13	11	Germany	16,504	4.2	2.6
19	15	18	Hong Kong	9,600	-7.7	1.5
21	21	20	Thailand	7,720	6.9	1.2
15	19	21	Malaysia	6,856	10.4	1.1
55	26	25	South Africa	5,981	10.0	1.0
23	23	26	Singapore	5,600	-14.3	0.9
38	27	27	Indonesia	4,900	-5.5	0.8
28	34	32	Japan	4,100	-2.8	0.7

Source: WTO (1998), adapted from Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia (2001), Table A6.1 pg. A6-3.

A survey by the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board in 1999 has shown that 66% of tourists visited Malaysia for leisure and holiday purposes, including visiting friends and relatives, while another 10% were on business pursuits. Malaysia's current tourism strategy is to attract more international tourists and to encourage them to stay longer, spend more and undertake repeat visits. This strategy has been implemented through diversifying the range of tourism attractions, particularly nature, eco-tourism and rural tourism as outlined in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005).

Malaysia is endowed with abundant rural tourism products that could be promoted to generate the rural economy and improve the livelihood of the rural community. The northern states of Malaysia, including Kedah and Penang boast several interesting sites to be developed for rural tourism (Table 2). Even the Malay village (or *kampung*) is a natural attraction, with its deep-rooted customs and traditions, the unique design of traditional timber houses, as well as local artwork and work culture (Badaruddin 1993). Still, national statistics have portrayed the evidence of serious regional imbalances between the more prosperous urbanised areas and the lagging rural areas (Table 3). Rural tourism is thus perceived as a strategy for economic regeneration to address the issues of regional income distribution in the country. The Ministry of Rural Development Malaysia has targeted the less developed states, including Kedah and Seberang Perai, Penang, for rural and regional development. The strategy includes diversifying the economic base through the development of natural resource industries such as agro-business, timber, petrochemical, non-metal mining, travel industry, cultural heritage and other service sectors including eco-tourism, agro-tourism and aqua-tourism. The image of the rural sector as being backward and lagging should be transformed into something unique, attractive and of high value.

Table 2: Tourist Destinations in Penang, Kedah, Perlis and Perak States, Malaysia

Destinations	Northern States in Malaysia			
	Penang	Kedah	Perlis	Perak
<b>1. Islands</b>	Pulau Jerejak Pulau Rimau Pulau Tikus Pulau Aman Pulau Betong	Pulau Langkawi Pulau Dayang Bunting Pulau Beras Basah Pulau Singa Besar Pulau Rebak Pulau Tuba		Pulau Pangkor Pulau Pangkor Laut Pulau Sembilan
<b>2. Beaches</b>	Telok Bahang Batu Feringghi	Pantai Merdeka Pantai Murni Pantai Cenang Pantai Kok Pantai Tengkorak		Telok Batik Pasir Bogak Pantai Puteri Dewi Telok Balanga Telok Nipah
<b>3. Lakes</b>	Mengkuang Dam Air Itam Dam	Tasek Pedu Tasek Muda Tasek Ahning	Tasek Melati Timah Tasoh Tasek Meranti	Tasek Banding Taman Tasek Taiping
<b>4. Rivers</b>	Sungai Juru Sungai Pinang	Sungai Kedah Sungai Muda Sungai Merbok		Sungai Kerian Sungai Perak
<b>5. Sea Parks</b>		Pulau Payar Pulau Kaca		

		Pulau Lembu Pulau Segantang		
<b>6. Recreational Parks</b>		Bukit Wang Junjung Gunung Keriang		
<b>7. Recreational Forest</b>	Bukit Mertajam Telok Bahang Pantai Keracut Sungai Tukun Sungai Teroi	Telaga Tujuh Sungai Rambai Sungai Kunyit Sungai Badak Sri Perigi, Yan Lata Bukit Hijau Lata Mengkuang Lata Bayu Bukit Wang Batu Hampar Lubuk Semeling	Bukit Kubu	Kuala Sepetang Kaki Bukit Larut Kuala Won Pulau Pangkor Papan Lata Iskandar Lata Kekabu Ulu Kenas Ulu Kinta
<b>8. Forest Reserves</b>	Bukit Kerajaan Bukit Genting Bukit Relau Balik Pulau Penara Bukit Teluk Bahang Laksamana Pantai Aceh Bukit Gemuruh	Gunung Jerai Sungai Merbok Kisap Sintok Ulu Muda Pulau Tuba Pulau Singa Besar Pulau Dayang Bunting	Rimba Mas Mata Air Bukit Bintang Tebing Tinggi Perlis State Park	Bukit Hijau Bukit Larut Bukit Korbu Keledang Salong Kenderong Matang Pangkor Pulau Gula Pulau Selinsing Tanjung Burung
<b>9. Wildlife Parks</b>	Taman R-Rama Telok Bahang		Taman Buaya Perlis State Park	Deer Farm Zoo Taiping Kuala Gula
<b>10. Waterfalls</b>	Batu Feringgi Titi Krawang Bayan Lepas	Lata Asam Jawa Lata Bukit Hijau Puncak Janing Pedu Muda Sungai Muda Sungai Charok Wang Sungai Kelim Sungai Perigi Junjung Batu Hampar Sungai Batu Pahat	Genting Kabu	Lata Iskandar Lata Kekabu Lata Kinjang Lata Rawang Ulu Kinta Kuala Won Batang Padang Belah Belum Austin Falls
<b>11. Hills</b>	Penang Hill		Bukit Keteri Bukit Lagi Bukit Jernih	Bukit Larut Bukit Pangkor Bukit Kura-Kura

<b>12. Mountains</b>		Gunung Jerai Gunung Keriang Peranginan Sik Lata Mengkuang	G. Medan Gunung Perlis	Gunung Korbu
<b>13. Caves</b>			Gua Kelam Gua Katak Gua Wang Burma	Gua Tempurung Gua Kandu

Source: Norizan Md. Nor (2003).

Table 3: Incidence of Hard-core Poverty by State in Malaysia (1990 and 1997)

States	1990 (% of household)			1997 (% of household)		
	Overall	Urban	Rural	Overall	Urban	Rural
1. Johor	1.5	0.7	4.5	0.3	0.1	0.5
2. Kedah	8.4	3.5	9.1	3.9	1.0	5.5
3. Kelantan	7.2	4.7	8.1	5.8	3.8	6.8
4. Melaka	3.8	0.7	4.5	0.6	0.3	0.9
5. Negeri Sembilan	2.2	0.7	3.0	1.3	0.0	2.5
6. Pahang	2.1	0.5	2.6	0.8	0.2	1.2
7. Penang	2.1	0.5	3.1	0.2	0.2	0.3
8. Perak	4.9	0.7	6.6	0.9	0.4	1.5
9. Perlis	3.2	1.3	3.4	2.6	1.1	3.2
10. Selangor	1.1	0.7	1.3	0.4	0.2	0.9
11. Terengganu	10.4	5.8	13.4	5.2	2.3	7.6
12. Federal Territory	0.5	0.5	n.a.	0.1	0.1	n.a.
13. Sabah	9.3	1.0	11.3	1.9	0.5	2.7
14. Sarawak	3.3	0.6	5.7	0.7	0.1	1.1

Source: Government of Malaysia (2001).

### Case Studies of Rural Tourism Initiatives in Kedah and Seberang Perai, Penang

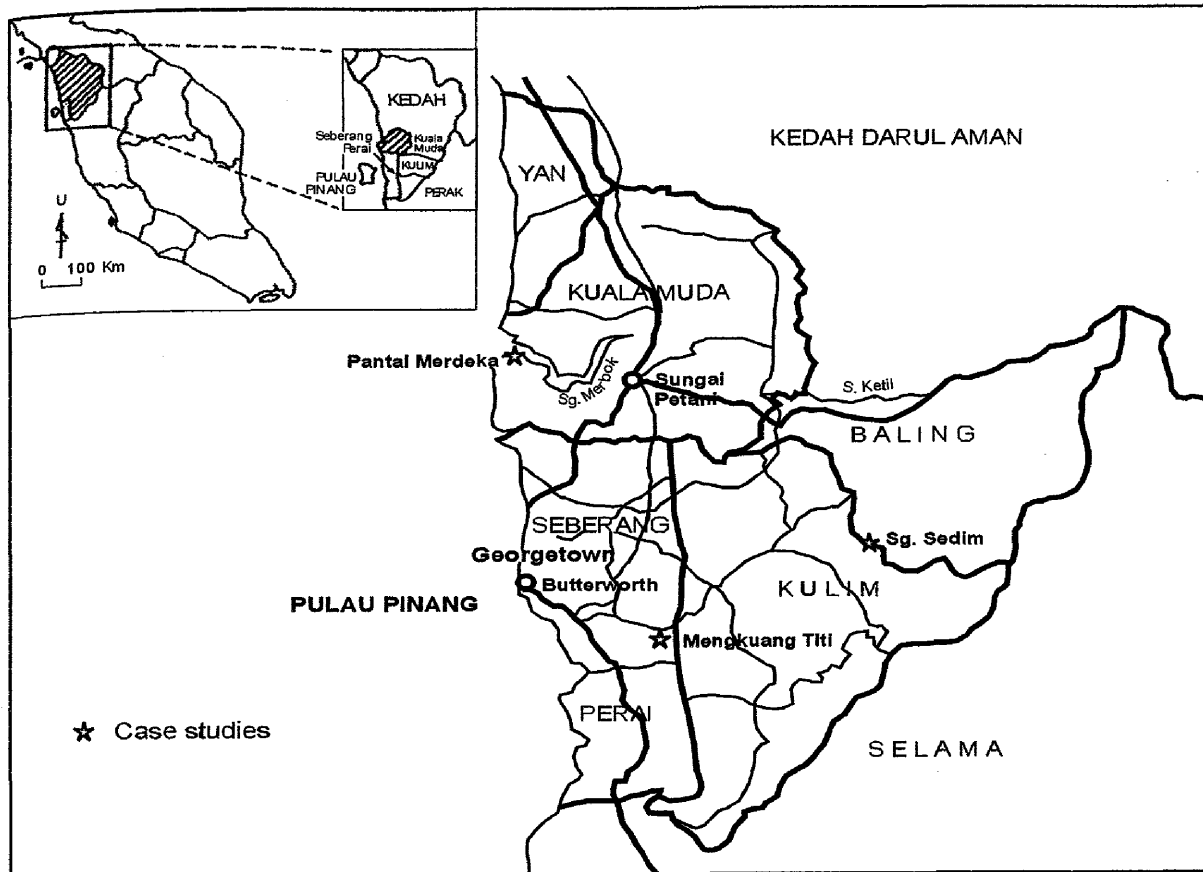
Kedah is the oldest state in Malaysia. Some of the earliest known Stone Age artefacts and sites were found in the Bujang Valley, believed to be the remains of a 6<sup>th</sup> century Hindu kingdom. Maharaja Derbar Raja, the ruler of Kedah during the 12<sup>th</sup> century who converted to Islam and changed his name to Sultan

Muzaffar Shah, marked the beginning of an Islamic Sultanate in Kedah. Predominantly an agricultural state, Kedah is known as the “Rice-bowl of Malaysia”, a term that reflects the aesthetic significance of the flat expanse of paddy fields against a backdrop of rolling hills. Today, under the Action Plan for a Developed Kedah 2010, the State is geared to utilise its human, capital and natural assets to shift its economic thrust from agriculture to industry. However, agriculture and tourism sectors remain integral to its economy.

Historical records showed that the Portuguese first discovered Penang Island in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and named her *Pulo Pinaom*, probably due to the *pinang* or betel nut palm found on the island. Penang was later established as the first British settlement in the Far East in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Following negotiations with the Sultan of Kedah, Francis Light took possession of the island in 1786 and named it the Prince of Wales Island. Geographically, Penang today comprises two sections: the more densely populated and developed island, and the rapidly developing Seberang Perai mainland. Penang is one of the leading states in Malaysia with a GDP per capita of RM 10,867 (US\$2,860) in 2000. This figure is higher compared to the Malaysian average of RM 7,593 (US\$1,998) and the Kedah average of RM 5,423 (US\$1,427) during the same period (Government of Malaysia 1996). Penang’s booming economy is driven primarily by the industrial and services sectors, particularly tourism. According to SERI (2003), Penang is renowned for its numerous tourist attractions. For instance, agro-tourism sites are located at Kampung Mengkuang Titi, Pulau Aman and Kampung Seronok, whilst eco-tourism activities are found at Pantai Kerachut and Pantai Acheh. However, all these rural tourism sites are generally underdeveloped and lacking in tourist amenities.

This paper highlights three case studies of rural tourism initiatives in Kedah and Seberang Perai, Penang, undertaken as a measure to improve the economic livelihood of the rural inhabitants. These rural tourism initiatives are (a) white-water rafting at Sungai Sedim, Kulim, Kedah; (b) beaches at Pantai Merdeka, Kedah; and (c) agro-tourism at Kampung Mengkuang Titi, Seberang Perai, Penang. The locations of these rural tourism attraction sites are shown in Figure 1. Each rural tourism initiative is discussed in turn in the following sections.

Figure 1: Location of Case Studies  
(Sungai Sedim, Pantai Merdeka and Kampung Mengkuang Titi)



Source: Fatimah (2003).

### a) White-water Rafting at Sungai Sedim, Kulim, Kedah

Sungai Sedim is located a short distance away from large, rapidly growing population centres in northern Malaysia such as Butterworth (40 km), Georgetown (60 km) and Sungai Petani (20 km). Sungai Sedim is an exciting tourist destination and recreation centre in Kedah, boasting a 13 km stretch of fast-flowing waters and rapids, which are excellent for white-water sports activities (Photo 1 and Photo 2). Kayaking, canoeing, rafting, camping, mountain climbing and jungle tracking are recommended activities in the area, but visitors are cautioned against swimming due to the strong currents.

Several jungle tracks are also available in the area, leading to nearby peaks such as Mount Inas, Mount Bintang Utara, Mount Bintang and Bintang Range. The area is rich in flora and fauna of lowland dipterocarp forest such as *meranti*

*seraya, meranti tembaga, meranti melantai* and non-dipterocarp species such as *kulim, terap keledang* and *bintangor*.

Photo 1: Rafting at Sungai Sedim

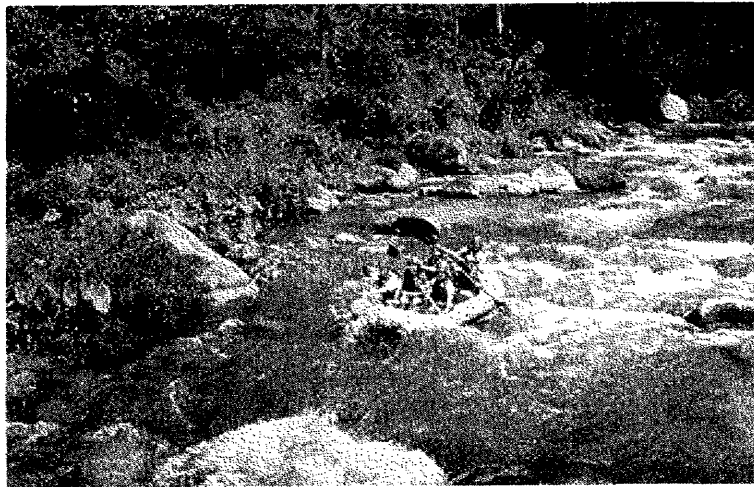
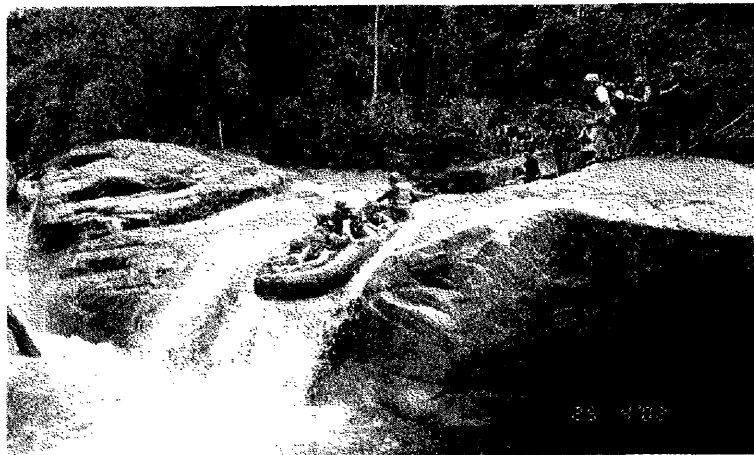


Photo 2: River Rapids at Sungai Sedim



The Kedah State Government has planned to transform the wild water rapids in the Sungai Sedim recreational forest into a prime sports water destination in the region (Sekaran 2000). The International Canoe Federation has recognised Sungai Sedim as an excellent spot for white-water adventures. Several international and national events have been held at the rapids including the Kedah International Wild Water Challenge 1999, the Malaysian International Outdoor Challenge 2000, the Kedah Open Challenge 2000, and the Mount Bintang Challenge 2001. Several packages are available for the adventure tourists who are keen on white-water pursuits. In lieu of a growing tourist demand, the government has allocated RM 3 million (US\$789,474) to upgrade the river stretch and provide more world-class facilities.

There is no doubt that the commercial white-water industry could contribute substantially to diversify the Kedah economy, especially in the remote regions, as recreation and tourism have grown to become an important source of employment, income and pride in the local community. However, incidents of physical deterioration and user conflicts reflect a norm amidst competition for scarce resources. With a booming popularity of water sports, the relevant authorities, including Kulim Municipal Council, Department of Forestry, Department of Drainage and Irrigation, and the local operator company, who are responsible for preserving high-quality river experiences and providing adequate public access, are now faced with the outcomes of such indiscriminate development. Potential problems include overloaded public services, congestion, pollution, and degraded river carrying capacity.

Future challenges confronting the authorities involve the capacity to nurture the overall socio-economic benefits of an expanding white-water industry, whilst protecting the common property resources and the quality of the visitors' experiences. Such multiple goals may well lead to conflicts and compromises; but the State has since recognised its pervasive role in managing commercial rafting to ensure its long-term viability. Some critical management issues include access for other river users, public safety, and the environmental impact of heavy river usage. A blueprint of an integrated management plan for commercial river use could well provide local policy-makers and resource managers with a framework to establish an acceptable standard, which responds to changes in the recreation setting as well as accommodates long-term monitoring and evaluation of natural resource conditions in the State of Kedah.

### ***b) Beaches at Pantai Merdeka, Kedah***

The name Merdeka, which means 'independence', makes the beach a crowd puller, especially on Malaysia's Independence Day which falls on 31 August. Besides this patriotic name, the enchanting white and sandy beach, which stretches for 1 km with Mount Jerai in the background, is the only beach on mainland Kedah that is suitable for swimming (Photo 3). Located in the district of Kuala Muda, Pantai Merdeka is in close proximity to Kedah and Penang urban centres, approximately 60 km south of Alor Setar, 30 km from Sungai Petani, 40 km from Butterworth and 60 km from Georgetown. Water in the area is relatively shallow and safe for picnickers. This spot is also popular among tourists en route to Tanjong Dawai, a seafood products haven. For a fare of RM 1.50 (US\$0.40) per passenger, visitors can take a leisurely boat ride from Pantai Merdeka to Tanjong Dawai to purchase locally-made seafood products such as dried fish, anchovies, crackers, cookies, cakes and *belacan* (shrimp paste) at a bargain (Photo 4). Visitors can also visit traditional fishing villages, experience

the village lifestyles, and savour the variety of seafood and other local delicacies sold at nearby food stalls.

Photo 3: Bathing at Pantai Merdeka



Photo 4: Seafood Products at Tjg. Dawai



Those seeking for more adventures can go kayaking, canoeing, water skiing and sailing along the Pantai Merdeka coastline. One can also go kayaking or boating to Pulau Sayak or along Merbok River, which is located at the mouth of Pantai Merdeka. Here, one can enjoy a breathtaking panorama of Mount Jerai and the mangrove forest along its banks right to where the saline waters end, a

distance of 50 km from the coast. The Merbok River Mangrove Forest Reserve houses one of the most species-diverse mangrove forests in the world that is home to approximately 30 species of true mangroves.

Pantai Merdeka also offers both diving and sport fishing off its coast, especially at Pulau Bidan, Pulau Island, Pulau Songsong and Pulau Bunting. In addition to the camping facilities available at Pantai Merdeka, Pulau Bidan with its 1 km long and half kilometre wide beach also makes a perfect camping ground. At RM 80 (US\$21) per package, visitors can take a boat ride to the surrounding areas of Pantai Merdeka such as Pulau Sayak, Telok Amboi, Telok Nipah and Tanjung Puteri. At Pulau Sayak, visitors can indulge in a variety of activities, from visiting the historical tomb of Tengku Kudin (one of the early Kedah Rulers) to observing and learning how prawns are bred using state-of-the-art technology.

Pantai Merdeka, which is shaded by tall palm trees and coastal beach strand forest, is rich in flora and fauna. The vegetation here consists mainly of *Hibiscus* and *Pandanaceae* species. Several types of local birds such as *merbah*, *punai* and *merpati* can be found in the area. Besides bird watching and seashore fishing, activities such as jungle tracking and rock climbing are also ideal in Pantai Merdeka, especially at Penjara Hill which is located at the northern part of the beach. Penjara Hill is famous for its Sang Gelembai<sup>1</sup> myths and is also a historical and archeological site where the Buddhagupta<sup>2</sup> inscriptions were found. This discovery has confirmed that Sungai Mas was an ancient Kedah coastal state, functioning as a major entrepot harbour during the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Penjara Hill was once possibly used as a guard post for maritime activities in Merbok Bay and the Straits of Malacca. Sungai Mas Archeological Museum is another tourism attraction located about 10 km from Pantai Merdeka.

Notably, Pantai Merdeka has a diverse range of tourism products that can be developed as income-generating alternatives for the local folks. To achieve such ends, cooperative efforts among all stakeholders in both public and private sectors should be pursued and strengthened. Local participation should be expanded through appropriate mechanisms to explore and promote heritage and cultural attractions, leisure and sports-related activities, and educational tourism opportunities available at Pantai Merdeka. The State Government and Sungai Petani Local Authority, as custodians of Pantai Merdeka, should play a prominent role in ensuring that the basic infrastructure and regular maintenance

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<sup>1</sup> Sang Gelembai also called Gedembai was a famous cursor in the old Malay legend.

<sup>2</sup> Buddhagupta is a stone inscription artifact which could be related to the formation of ancient Kedah coastal state. Other findings in Sungai Mas historical sites were numerous pieces of ceramics, glass and beads from China, West Asia, India or local, the ruins of temples dedicated to Hindu gods and Buddha, and structures of sunken towns and harbours.

are provided to meet the visitors' needs and requirements, including cleanliness, safety, comfort, and an array of activities (Fatimah 2003). Integrated, low-density, environment-friendly developments such as information kiosks, chalets and homestay attractions should be encouraged on Pantai Merdeka.

In addition, the State should strictly enforce legislative measures to safeguard the Merbok River mangrove forests. In line with the tenets of eco-tourism, the mangrove area should be preserved and rehabilitated as an educational forest for academic visits and research pursuits. The Merbok Mangrove Forest Reserve management should follow in the footsteps of the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve operations, located in Taiping about 150 km south of Merbok River. Here, the Department of Forestry has successfully implemented sustainable management of the Matang Mangrove Forest to ensure continuous production of mangrove timber (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia 2001).

### **c) Agro-tourism at Kampung Mengkuang Titi, Seberang Perai, Penang**

Located some 30 km away from Malaysia's second largest city, Georgetown, Kampung Mengkuang Titi is a promising agro-tourism destination, well-known for its wide array of agricultural-based activities. Comprising about 1,000 inhabitants, Kampung Mengkuang Titi is a typical Malay *kampung* (village) based on agrarian economy. In 1996, the village was selected in a nationwide exercise as one of the agro-tourism sites to be developed under the Integrated Agricultural Development Program (IADP) administered by the Ministry of Agriculture Malaysia. One of the main objectives of IADP was to diversify the agricultural-based products in order to generate additional income for the rural folks.

Set amidst green paddy fields, coconut, rubber, and oil palm trees, the village scene of Kampung Mengkuang Titi offers a refreshing change from the chaos of city life. Apart from enjoying the countryside and the architectural styles of Malay traditional timber houses, tourists can partake the typical *kampung* lifestyles. Activities can range from rubber tapping and plucking oil palm fruits and coconuts, to mat weaving, making traditional delicacies such as cakes and *satay* (barbecued marinated meat cuts), preparing traditional ointments and medicines, and participating in past-time activities and games. Other interesting pursuits include recreational activities along jogging trails, visits to tropical fruit farms, and homestay programmes. The serene *kampung* ambience blended with the unique Malay traditional cultures, lifestyles and hospitality have proven to be an asset for Kampung Mengkuang Titi (Photo 5 and Photo 6).

Photo 5: A Malay Traditional House



Photo 6: Playing Traditional Musical Instruments in the Kampung



Since its inception, the number of tourist arrivals in Kampung Mengkuang Titi has been quite encouraging (Table 4), bringing in substantial additional income to the local villagers. In certain circumstances, the number of tourists visiting the agro-tourism sites has been deliberately kept low. This is to ensure that the village would be able to maintain its quaint atmosphere and that the villagers could carry out their daily routines with minimal interruption. Nonetheless, the diversity and genetic traits found in the village could be enhanced through an integrated marketing concept and strategy. For instance, the sale of local produce should not be constrained to only tourists visiting the site, but also to penetrate the markets in the surrounding communities and urban centres.

Table 4: Tourist Arrivals in Kg Mengkuang Titi, Seberang Perai, Penang

Year	Number of Tourists	Income Generated (RM)
1997	64	1,920
1998	75	2,250
1999	81	2,430
2000	57	2,850

*Source:* Penang Integrated Agriculture Development Project, at <http://iadppg.moa.my/pmu/agrotourism/latar.html>.

The notion of visiting a farmstead for vacation has caught the attention of holiday-makers worldwide. Whilst eco-tourism draws adventure tourists into the remote areas, agro-tourism, on the other hand, encourages producers to invest and manage the natural and cultural resources on their property through viable production techniques, leading to the enhancement of biodiversity (SAI Platform 2003). Agro-tourism thus advocates sustainable, small-scale farm holdings, be it organic, traditional or other types of small landholders, to maintain their natural and cultural landscapes, and to pursue the benefits of environmental tourism. In the case of Mengkuang Titi, the Federal Government through the Ministry of Agriculture has provided financial initiatives and technical assistance to improve the productivity of rubber, oil palm, coconut and fruit smallholders, whilst maintaining sustainable farming practices.

Diversity in agro-tourism practices is meaningful and appealing when it is presented within its socio-cultural context, where tourists can purchase farm products with an understanding of their traditional production techniques, unique craft-making processes, or in the context of local festivities. In many developed nations, agro-tourism represents a symbiotic tie between agriculture and tourism (Murphy 1991), and is widely utilised as a tool to manage natural resources through sustainable cultivation practices, including soil management, animal health and protection, and the enhancement of waterways and the surrounding environment. Reduced chemical use, preservation of native vegetation and traditional erosion control measures are benefits accruing from sustainable farming practices (SAI Platform 2003).

Agro-tourism, which showcases the traditional lifestyles and work cultures of the rural community, has made Kampung Mengkuang Titi and other countryside destinations a popular site for holidays and excursions. Policy-makers and leaders of Kampung Mengkuang Titi in particular should be updated on the visitor profiles and expenditure structures in order to realistically evaluate decisions related to local tourism development. Community leaders and others involved with rural tourism development should also be informed of the

economic impacts of visitors to the community. The direct economic impact may include increase in sales, employment, payroll and tax revenues. Other non-monetary benefits include improved public and recreational facilities, expanded social and cultural opportunities, and a sense of pride in one's community. Kampung Mengkuang Titi may well emulate the success of other more advanced communities in their sustainable agriculture practices and the diversification of income potentials to secure a promising future.

## **Policy Implications and Conclusion**

The rural entity is rather like an ecosystem. An ecosystem is essentially an element of nature that regulates the interface and interactions between living creatures and non-living matters to produce an exchange of materials between them (Odum 1970). Tourism, including rural tourism, can be perceived as part of this ecosystem since it involves tourists' interactions and communications with the living and non-living components at destination areas to experience a tourism product; and to subsequently generate an exchange of revenues amongst stakeholders (Murphy 1991). Hence, adopting an ecological community approach in rural tourism is deemed most appropriate as this reflects an intimate understanding of the interdependency that exists within the rural tourism system, and specifically within the host community in fulfilling its hospitality function in a viable manner (Murphy 1991).

This paper has deliberated on the three case studies of white-water rafting at Sungai Sedim, Kulim, Kedah; beaches at Pantai Merdeka, Kedah; and agro-tourism at Kampung Mengkuang Titi, Seberang Perai, Penang. All the case studies have portrayed the interdependency of the key components in the rural tourism sphere. These components are the environment, accessibility, economics, as well as social, cultural and management considerations. Based on the potentials of these destinations, the state and local authorities concerned should ensure that all aspects of the key components and their interrelationships are carefully understood and monitored. The performance of these key components should also be gauged against selected indicators bearing specified target settings. Some of the proposed indicators are shown in Table 5.

Based on this ecological perspective, the potential impacts of change brought about by tourism development in the rural areas may be better estimated and tolerated to a certain extent by the local people and authorities concerned. The host community's resource attractions, namely natural and cultural heritage, that form the basis of the rural tourism industry should be safeguarded and preserved to satisfy the requirements of a renewable resource industry. Any physical development, preferably of a non-obtrusive and lower-density nature, should be conducted in accordance with the proposed plan to strike a balance

between tourism, public space and conservation zone. Tourist facilities and public amenities should also be upgraded to meet acceptable standards. In any event, public opinion and political will should be strengthened to ensure that rural tourism initiatives receive long-term government support.

Table 5: Proposed Indicators for Sustainable Rural Tourism

• Environmental indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• carrying capacity of water resources</li> <li>• potential for multiple use of natural resources</li> <li>• ways to improve and control accessibility to tourism site</li> <li>• percentage of households with proper waste treatment</li> <li>• percentage of households engaged in waste recycling</li> </ul>
• Economic indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• share of tourism contribution to local tax base</li> <li>• share of different economic activities in total tax base (to gauge economic diversity)</li> <li>• number of job generation in tourism activities</li> <li>• ratio of local employees to foreign workers</li> <li>• sale volume of local produce</li> </ul>
• Socio-cultural Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of local involvement in training and education in tourism field</li> <li>• participation in on-the-job training in tourism field</li> <li>• ratio of renewable energy use among households</li> <li>• percentage of local people engaged in new enterprises such as homestays, handicraft displays, herb gardens etc.</li> <li>• changes in sustainable farming practices</li> </ul>
• Management Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• existence of formal measures to control development planning and implementation</li> <li>• level of satisfaction among tourists</li> <li>• number of repeat visits by tourists</li> <li>• satisfaction of local people engaged in tourism activities.</li> <li>• local perception of tourist impact on local community</li> </ul>

It is evident from the discussion that the goals and strategies for rural tourism development are complex and multidimensional, incorporating environmental aspects and concerns for community livelihood, as well as the need to satisfy visitors' requirements and expectations. The global trend towards sustainability has affected the attitudes of tourists, especially those from the developed nations. International tourists, in general, have become more

educated, more environmentally concerned and more experienced. Hence, their expectations have become higher, demanding only authentic and worthwhile experiences.

In any case, rural tourism in Malaysia has an array of potential offerings for such tourists, including natural elements (such as forests and mountains), as well as indigenous local attributes (such as customs, traditions and folklore). It is important for the Malaysian tourism authorities to assess the potentials, strengths and weaknesses of the variety of local rural tourism products in search of potential global niche markets. The identification of rural-tourism priority districts nationwide as documented in the Malaysian National Physical Plan is considered most timely in the interests of local resource protection and management (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Malaysia 2005).

More importantly, the general perception of rural areas as being backward and lagging should be transformed into an image of excitement and dynamism. Rural tourism sites may be developed but with certain restrictions. The countryside should remain isolated, quaint and unique, yet be upgraded and worthy for repeat visits. The rural community, particularly the younger generation, should undergo a period of education and training, and be integrated into the new rural enterprises to help generate alternative income sources. Collaborations between government agencies as well as private sector and non-governmental organisations should be increased to help support the management and operation of these newly established rural endeavours.

There are however many pitfalls along the way. Admittedly, mobilising the human capital and bringing about structural transformation have been the major challenges of rural tourism development in Malaysia. Issues of environmental management, local participation, effective legislation, global marketing and realistic planning are all equally crucial in realising the goals of sustainable rural tourism. However, the Malaysian Government has been committed to improving the quality of life of the rural folks, partly through strategic development in rural tourism. It is hoped that the adoption of an ecological community approach in rural tourism development would enhance the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable rural tourism in Malaysia, particularly in the States of Kedah and Seberang Perai, Penang.

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