CRITICAL TOURIST DESTINATION: THE IMPACT OF THE MALAYSIAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA TOWARDS NATURE-BASED TOURIST ATTRACTION

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Abstract

Urban systems in Malaysia have become part of the global social, economic and political matrix confronted by rapid growth. Cities in Malaysia as in the rest of the world are increasingly faced by ever changing development. Urbanization has become one of the major components for Malaysia’s development agenda. In the process of achieving the status of ‘developed nation’ by the year 2020, competition of land use for economic development had become more significant for the major sector like housing, manufacturing, transport and tourism. Many efforts are taken by the government especially in adding in the infrastructure and facilities related to tourism sector. Existing established tourism destination has not being maintained, upgraded or improved. Potential nature-based tourist attractions have been neglected and unforeseen. Instead, greater emphasized was given to the development of new commercialised urban centres. These phenomena have created a ‘critical situation’ for the existing and the potential tourist attractions as the development agenda continues. Could these areas being sustained and competed with the other economic sector? To what extend the government gives priorities for tourism sector as this the second biggest source of income for Malaysia? This paper will focus on the existing scenario of “critical tourist destinations” in Malaysia. The factors contribute to this phenomena and its impact towards the tourism industry. Research area will focus on the tourism development corridors, physical urban centres and the related policy.

*Keywords: urbanization, land use, corridor, tourist attractions, critical, phenomena*

Introduction

Tourism sector in this country is expected to gain income-exceeding RM 30 billion based on forecast of more than 15 million foreign tourists’ arrival to this country. This forecast number is among highest in the country’s tourism industry history compared to 10.3 million tourists with income of RM25.2 billion last time. This incensement is due to the Arabian tourists whom divert their destination choices to Asia following the closed-door policy by United States of America on receiving Islam tourist after the 11 September 2001’s incident. Tourist arrival is expected to increase 8.4% per year to reach 24.6 million by the year 2010. Main incentives are given to tourism projects, including eco-tourism and agrotourism projects and enjoying tax incentives given by the government. These include hotel businesses, construction of holiday camps, recreational projects including summer camps, and construction of convention centres with a capacity to accommodate at least 3,000 participants. Construction of medium and low-cost hotels (up to a three-star category hotel as certified by the Ministry of Tourism) is also given the incentives. The three Main Incentives for the Tourism Industry are The Pioneer Status, The Investment Tax Allowance and The Additional Incentives for Hotels and Tourism Projects.

Penang Island

Penang, also known as the ‘Pearl of the Orient’, is located on the north west coast of Peninsula Malaysia (Map 2). The State is bounded on the north and east by Kedah, to the

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South by Perak and to the west by the Straits of Malacca and Sumatra (Indonesia). Penang consists of Penang Island, which covers an area of 285 sq. km, and a coastal strip of 760 sq. km on the mainland known as Seberang Perai (Province Wellesley). The island is separated from the mainland by a channel. They are linked by the 13.5 km-long Penang Bridge and a 24-hour ferry service that plies the channel. The Penang State Government has taken a firm decision to diversify the economy's base away from basic industries like agriculture, livestock and fishing towards more value-added resource such as manufacturing. Penang has succeeded in restructuring its economic development. The agriculture's share of the State's GDP declined from 6.5% in 1980 to 3.3% in 1990. The share of secondary sector (construction and manufacturing) in the State's GDP increased from about 45.2% in 1980 to 48.9% in 1990. Towards the 21st century Penang are considered one of the most developed island in Malaysia.

Tioman Island

Tioman is the third largest island in Peninsular Malaysia after Penang and Langkawi and situated 32 km from Mersing. The pear-shaped island of 137.7 square km is characterized by rugged terrain, sandy beaches and tropical forest (see Map 3). Flat land covering only 4.6 per cent and is confined to the coast. The warm waters and good visibility of its surrounding waters make Tioman a paradise for divers and snorkellers. This island is an idyllic spot for leisurely days under the sun. There are several villages scattered around the coastline, the larger ones being Tekek follow by Salang, Genting, Paya and Juara. Tioman's verdant greenery is home to a splendid variety of plants and small animal, and its flora and fauna has been featured in National Geographic's documentaries. The island's granite formations make excellent rock-climbing adventures.

Problem Statement

Economic development has been an important agenda of the country in this 21st century. Various efforts has been taken by the ruling government to make Malaysia as one of the developed country in Asia as to be on the same par with other well established countries like Singapore, Japan and Korea. Many economic sectors have been given priority such as manufacturing, business, housing, infrastructure and tourism. The development of tourism projects and infrastructures needs sufficient place for land use to provide quality and economic tourism products and most importantly is to attract tourists. Economic contribution through tourism sector has become the second main contributor to the country's economy after manufacturing. Knowing the importance of tourism sector, space and tourism area is needed and must be protected from being intruded, being misused or exchanged for other developments. Physical and infrastructure development have been given priority by the government, as it is the main generator for other economic sectors. Nowadays, established tourism projects or projects with tourism attraction prospects are no longer stable and guaranteed. Important political agendas, public importance and prosperity of the people has been used as reasons by policy makers and administrators in paving way for other sectors developments compared to tourism sectors. This situation continues and many development projects have been implemented even though certain areas or state is well established as a tourist state or tourist island. Identification of these tourist attractions in Malaysia is slowly facing extinction and no longer popular. Two areas or state has been identified to be researched on the impacts of physical and infrastructure developments towards the tourism sector. They are Penang and Tioman Island. Will the identity of Penang as the 'Pearl of the Orient' be maintained or disappear? Will nature and paradise lovers of the Pacific could still enjoy the beauty of Tioman Island? In early 1990s, Phuket Island and Koh Samui Island in Thailand is known and celebrated for its beauty and peaceful beaches, but nowadays many privileges have been given to physical and infrastructure developments by the government.
Research Approach

The research is conducted using “development trend” approach scenario as guidance, which is based on economic and physical policies factors. These factors changes and designs the atmosphere for land uses activities and act as direction for development agenda of the country.

Method used is based on characteristic of two chosen research areas namely Penang and Tioman Island of Malaysia. The two tourist destination has different features and development’s strategies even though both are tourism islands. They have their own uniqueness and identity.

Research Foundation

Three factors that are used as the research’s foundation have the following elements:
Development Policy
Policy is the foundation and guidance for implementing development projects, whether on short term or long-term basis. The country’s five year national policy, the state governments’ and local authority’s policies acts as guideline for implementing economic objectives. Physical developments are the outcome from these development policies.

Objectives and Economic Strategy
Economic factors are used as a main factor on why physical and infrastructure development is implemented. Priority is given for development thus becomes a reason for tourism projects to “give way” for other infrastructure projects.

Physical Development.
It has been a trend in Malaysia that economic development is always related to sophisticated and advanced physical and infrastructure’s developments. It is unsure whether these developments are good and feasible with based solely on policy and guideline without ground implementation.

Government Development Agenda
Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy and developing countries are attempting to cash in on this expanding industry in an attempt to boost foreign investment and financial reserves. While conceding that the uncontrolled growth of this industry can result in serious environmental and social problems, the United Nations contends that such negative effects can be controlled and reduced. Arguing that ‘tourism needs to be more sustainable’. In Malaysia a new development policy stated in the Eight Malaysia Plan(2006-2010) under the Second Outline Perspective Plan and Vision 2020 has been implemented in order to make more rapid progress toward highly developed industrial country in 21st century. The words of New Challenge and New Strategy are the main agenda in the Plan.

Development Strategy for Penang
Apart from the Penang Bridge, which is worth RM 3 billion, two more mega projects will be carried out under the RMK-9, which are the monorail project and the Penang Outer Ring Road. According to Prime Minister, the second bridge will not only benefit the state but also contribute to the development of the northern region and strengthen its role as a transport hub. The Prime Minister added that before this, the northern region focused on agriculture linked projects thus the developments of these places are not good as Klang Valley or Kinta Valley. However, the government wants the northern region to enjoy the developments not only from the small and medium industries which is related to agriculture but also remain the hi-tech industrial areas like Bayan Lepas, Kulim Hi-Tech and the motor industry in Gurun and Bertam.

The Development Corridor in Penang Island
There are seven (7) main development corridors in Penang which occupying 60% of the coastal area of the island.

Development Strategy and Issues  Facing Tioman Island
Corals were once the main attraction for tourists, but the controversial RM40 million public marina, now a year into its construction, is ‘choking; the corals. The projects spans 127,000 squares meters and is expected to include the docking facilities, and administration building, water breakers and a cargo jetty. The jetty is expected to be 30m wide at the tip and stretch 175m into the sea. Sedimentation is a major headache in any construction project on an environmentally-sensitive island like Tioman, and the future looks bleak for
surviving coral beyond the 30m radius. At present, the number of black sea urchins in the area was three times higher than normal, and this is a sign of unhealthy levels of dead corals.

Table 1: Development Corridors in Penang Island

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Penang Island Component/ Development Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tanjong Tokong-Batu Ferringhi – Telok Bahang Corridor Commercial / Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Georgetown-Ayer Itam- Paya Trubong Corridor Commercial / Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Georgetown-Bayan Baru-Teluk Kumbar Corridor Commercial / Industrial/ Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Balik Pulau- Genting Corridor Residential / Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kepala Batas- Bertam Residential-Commercial-Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Butterworth-Teluk Air Tawar Residential/ Commercial/ Recreation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Penang Structure Plan, 2006 (Revised)

In another development, the proposed construction of a large new airport will directly affect Kampung Paya and nearby Kampung Genting. The airport’s 2.1 km-long runway will be built on the sea and is capable of handling 300-seater Boeing 737s. Although Environmental Impact Assessment was approved in 2003, several matters had to be ironed out by the authorities before work could start. One of the options is to build the most environmental friendly road to connect the airport to Kampung Tekek.

Table 2: Facilities and Services in Tioman Island

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Services</th>
<th>Location &amp; Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of village for the Whole Tioman Island (Tekek, Paya, Genting, Nyior Sebatang, Salang and Juara)</td>
<td>6 villages/ Sea frontage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Local resident</td>
<td>2100 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most populated area</td>
<td>1100 persons (Tekek Village)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Duty Free Shops (whole Tioman Island)</td>
<td>9 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Domestic / Grocery shops</td>
<td>20 from 6 villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial premises in Tekek Village</td>
<td>7 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seafood/ Western Food Restaurant</td>
<td>12 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Restaurant &amp; Food Stall</td>
<td>35 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number 4 star resort</td>
<td>1 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jetty for Ferry</td>
<td>6 unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Short Term Research, Budget Chalet of Island Tourism, USM, 2005
Tourism Critical Areas

Critical Area means area or tourism zones or tourist attraction spot, which is not safe(unstable) and have a high potential to be explore (develop) or to be reused as area for non-tourism usage. Nowadays, the trend in Malaysia are these areas are giving ways to building infrastructure and public facilities that will be used as supports or catalyst to other economic sectors of development.

Critical Areas in Penang Island:

Recreational (or public) Beach: An established and a well-known tourist attraction which is used by local people as recreational family areas on weekends. Forest Reserve and Natural Green Areas, which is used from reserved (protected) area into a modern development land use, especially for exclusive housing or higher end recreation for certain group.

Areas or tourism destinations which have potential to be developed but are less popular among tourist because lack of promotion or upgrading allocation.

Critical Areas in Tioman Island:

Natural Beach : Located along the coastline of the island, which attracts many tourists (especially foreigners) but does not need advanced public facilities or efficient access. Natural forest area which have unexplored plants and vegetations Local focused area and economic activities centers with public facilities and sufficient services i.e Tekek Village. Marine life areas such as coral and various species fish areas located within 200 meters along the coast of Tioman Island.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water-Based</td>
<td>Public beaches</td>
<td>Batu Ferringhi, Teluk Bahang, Tanjong Tokong, Batu Maung, Teluk Kumbar, Pantai Jerejak, Pantai Berseh, Teluk Air Tawar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waterfall</td>
<td>Batu Ferringhi, Teluk Bahang, Ceruk Tok Kun, Botanical Garden, Youth Park, Permatang Pasir, Teluk Kumbar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>River / Lake</td>
<td>Mengkuang Dam, Pulau Betong, Ampang Jajar, Air Itam Dam, Krian River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest-Based</td>
<td>Natural Forest</td>
<td>Ceruk Tok Kun Forest, Teluk Bahang, Penang Hill, Air Itam Forest, Youth Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain-Based</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penang Hill, Botanical Garden, Balik Pulau</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water-based</th>
<th>Public Beach</th>
<th>Tekek Village, Juara Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Island</td>
<td>Air Batang Village, Marine Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tulai Island, Rengis Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest-based</td>
<td>Natural Forest</td>
<td>Tekek Village, Juara Village, Genting Village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Identification of Beach Resort in Malaysia, Short Term Research, USM, 2005

Research Finding: The Impacts

A two year research on Penang Island and Tioman Island appears that critical tourism areas are increasing from the sustainable level to a level where maintaining as a tourism destination is gradually low. Among the extreme conspicuous impacts are:

Impact Towards Penang Island

No Replacement for Tourism Spot.

Almost 80% of the Penang Island is surrounded with open beaches, which offers the most beautiful and the best tourism area in Malaysia in the year 1960’s to 1990. Until June 2006, there are left around 40% of the beach area in Penang, which can be used as tourism destination while the remaining have been explored and developed as elite’s high cost housing areas and a passage for coastal roads. Intruded established and potential tourism spot are not replaced and there seem no other alternatives for tourism attraction.

Priorities To Coastal Roads/ Highways

More priorities have been given to the development of Coastal (Beach) Highway in Penang Island. It is because of the island’s topography, which have limited flat areas for highway construction. Most of the established tourist attractions in Penang Island are located along this coastline. The major coastal roads that have intruded into public beaches and being transformed into highways are the Jelutong Outer Ring Road, stretches about 7 km along the beautiful coastline of Jerejak Beach, the 2 km Gurney Drive and the 5 km Butterworth Outer Ring Road.

Development Focused on Physical Infrastructure

Development allocation by the Central government is more focused on physical developments such as road infrastructure, housing estates and public facilities in Penang Island. This scenario makes the tourism sector “being left behind” and its status is not guaranteed as the infrastructure construction is still been given the first priority. Competition of space and land use between infrastructure project and tourism attraction are always stiff. However, physical infrastructure will always take the lead.

No Maintenance To Established Tourism Projects

The government has no initiative to make replacement or maintenance work if the tourism areas are damaged or intruded by other physical economic developments. In Penang Island a survey result shows, out of 7 tourist attractions that have been taken over for infrastructure development, only 1 have been replaced or given an alternative tourist site.
Impact Towards Tioman Island

Marina Development As Mega Projects

Almost 70% of Tioman Island is surrounded with crystal clear blue water and white beaches with undamaged marine life and corals. Others are areas with high lands and mountains rugged with matured tropical forest. Tekek Village is the most populated village (almost 1200 people) among the 9 villages in Tioman Island. It is the center for economic and administration activities, where 5 budget chalets and a 5 star resort situated along the beaches or on the highland. It has attracted many foreign tourists since early 1970’s. The development of a Marina in Tekek Village since 2004 has changed the environment and peacefulness of the village, its people and foreign tourists. Beachfront areas and coral lives along the Tekek Village beach is spoilt and resulting many corals being buried by mud from marina development just 20 meter from the shoreline.

No More Returned Tourists

Total foreign tourists, specifically the “regular or returned tourists’ arrival to the beach areas are becoming less due to the changes and decreasing beach areas. A drop of more than 30% has been recorded by 12 budget chalet operators from 5 of the main villages in Tioman Island. Tioman are no more a tourist heaven for European tourist. Chalet operators are becoming more worried about their future in accommodation industry. The government is more concerned about bringing heavy physical infrastructure project rather than promoting and maintaining Tioman as a virgin, natural tourist island.

Declaration Of Tioman as Duty-Free Island

Declaration of Tioman Island as the Duty Free Island in the year 2002 encouraged sudden and insistent physical development. The development agenda of the government has made Tioman Island like Langkawi Island, which lost its legends because of Duty Free Island status since 1987. 96% of tourists did not shop at duty-free outlets because they had different travel preferences, and shopping was not their primary motivation. In addition, the products sold were almost similar to those found in Penang and Langkawi and several towns in mainland Johor. This was not surprising as 7 out of 9 duty-free outlets were owned by businessmen from Penang and Langkawi, and the goods were mainly supplied from these two areas.
Conclusion

There is no need or justification for the proposed destruction of the seafront along the coastal water of Penang. The existing seafront is one of the few public recreation areas remaining on the island that is highly popular with Penangites or among Malaysian. Therefore, there is no need to massively transform the area into a tourist attraction when it already has that status. The tourist spot along the beaches already serves as a popular food spot, jogging site and a place for families to enjoy the evenings. It is very much a public heritage and ought to be preserved that way. We are very concerned that the Penang public will be losing precious open spaces to private developer. Such a proposal will indeed convert what is a natural seafront and accessible to the public into some kind of an amusement park to which the public will have access to only at a price. Uncontrolled tourism can have adverse effects on the environment and the island ecosystem. The issues associated with tourism in Tioman cannot be separated from more general issues concerning the thrust and direction of overall island development. It is vital to link tourism issues to broader matters and to consider various development options prior to commitment of resources. This interdependence between tourism and island development can be seen at a number of levels: through the different involvement of local people in tourism, through their views and tourists’ perception on the future of tourism, and through the structures that are in place to develop and promote the island and its tourism products.

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