**ECOTOURISM**

**SITES**

By Dr Vikneswaran Nair & Prof. Ir Dr Mohamed Daud

Pictures courtesy of Alfred Malon [www.malon.de].

There is a growing demand for ecotourism in Malaysia.

---

Ecotourism evolved from nature tourism, which can be defined as ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas. Using the same definition, ecotourism can be defined as ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, application, and conservation.

Ceballos-Lacayo, the pioneer to use the word “ecotourism”, in 1993 defined ecotourism as “Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”.

In Malaysia, there is a growing demand for ecotourism. Some of the popular ecotourism sites in Malaysia are listed in the Ecotourism Network (Expert System Research Group) of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) with a high number of hits as follows:

**PERLIS:**

**BUKIT KUBU AMENITY FOREST**

The 12ha Bukit Kubu Amenity Forest is a natural limestone cave in the forested Wang Pinang limestone hill. It is located near Kuala Perlis, 15km from Kangar.

The caves have an interesting geological formation and natural landscape but members of the public are not allowed to enter the caves without permission from the Perlis Forestry Department. Situated not far from the limestone hills is Kota Ai Matsum Kayang.

It is the burial grounds of two of the 16th century, Kedah Sultans, where one can see simple mausoleums marked by grave stones with wooden ruins that used to pinpoint the site.

**OTHER POPULAR SITES:**

Bukit Ayer Forest and Gua Kelam.

**KEDAH:**

**FULAU DAYANG BUNTING**

Tasik Dayang Bunting is a freshwater lake on the island of Dayang Bunting, the second largest in the Langkawi archipelago. There appears to be several versions of the Dayang Bunting legend. Some people believe the water of the lake possesses some mystical power of helping barren women to bear children.

**BATU HAMPAR RECREATIONAL FOREST**

The 4ha Batu Hampar Recreational Forest derived its name from the large round boulders found abundantly here. Established in 1980, it is located at Compartiment 19 Gunung Jerai Forest Reserve which is three kilometres from Yan or 32km south of Alor Setar.

The Raga River that flows through this recreational forest and villages is ideal for outdoor recreation activities and has won an award for being the cleanest and most beautiful river in Malaysia.

The virgin jungle reserve that is located not far from this recreational forest provides opportunity for educational and research purposes.
OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Gunung Jerai Forest Reserve, Pedu Forest Reserve, Ulu Muda Forest Reserve, Sungai Rambai Amenity Forest, Pulau Payar and Pulau Langkawi.

PENANG:

PENANG HILL (BUKIT BENDERA)
Malaysia’s first hill station, Penang Hill (Bukit Bendera) is 330m above sea level. Visitors can ascend to the top by either hiking up or by the two-stage funicular railway that has been operational since 1923. The train operates in two sections and passengers change railcars at midpoint. It takes about an hour to reach the summit and the train service operates at half-hour intervals. The funicular rail service begins at 6:30am and ends at 9:30pm.

From the cool, refreshing climate and the fantastic view at the summit, visitors can also view the picturesque bungalows, a beautiful flower garden and a bird park. There are bungalows for rent and a hotel for those who want to stay for more than a day. Visitors can also indulge in refreshments and snacks at a convenient tea kiosk located on top of the hill.

There is a good walking track up the hill. It takes four hours to reach the top and is recommended only for the more energetic.

The jungle trail begins at the ‘moongate’ at Jalan Air Terjun, about 300m from the Botanical Gardens’ entrance.

BATU FERRINGHI
Situated at Teluk Bahang, north of Penang Island, this is a beach with miles of white sand and sea. A choice of hotels and apartments, and the Penang Cultural Centre are located here. The beach front provides many recreational activities and is especially perfect for many water sports such as windsurfing, sun bathing, sailing, yachting, and swimming. At dawn or in the fading evening light there is time to contemplate the day ahead or to reflect on the experiences of another day on Penang. Batu Ferringhi, the ‘foreigner’s rock’, is a beach for lovers and dreamers.

OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Bukit Mertajam Amenity Forest, Teluk Bahang Amenity Forest and Pulau Jerejak.

PERAK:

BUKIT LARUT
Bukit Larut is about 1,250m above sea level. It is Malaysia’s oldest hill station and was founded in 1875 by T.W. Birch. In 1884, it was renamed Maxwell Hill (after Edward Maxwell, 1846-1897); recently the original local name “Bukit Larut” was restored. The hill station experiences the highest rainfall in the country. Bukit Larut preserves the atmosphere of a colonial hill station, with modest historical bungalows (Gendora and Tempinis) and rest houses (Bukit Larut and Gunung Hijau), and a atmosphere of cool and quiet environment.

Reaching the top of the hill requires a four-wheel drive jeep. Since private vehicles are not allowed entry, the resort authority caters to this service. The land rover is available at the foot of the hill and it will pass through the narrow winding road that was built shortly after World War II and was completed in 1948.

Bukit Larut is one of the finest getaways in Malaysia for a real retreat away from the hustle and bustle of city life, and to appreciate mountain birds.

MATANG FOREST RESERVE
The 40,711ha Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve has been gazetted as a Permanent Forest Reserve in 1906, and since 1908, the Perak Forestry Department has intensively managed it. About 80% of this area is sustainable-yield production forest, consisting mainly of the Bakau Minyak and Bakau Kurap species.

The whole area of this forest reserve is internationally renowned as the best managed sustainable mangrove forest in Malaysia and among the best managed such for-

How about a jungle walk in Tioman?

est worldwide. It is also recognized as the outstanding conservation management of the rich diversity of wildlife and habitats that thrive throughout the mangrove and mudflats ecosystems. Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve is the only place other than Kuala Gula where milky storks can be found.

OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Pantai Remis, Belum Forest Reserve, Temenggor Forest Reserve, Pangkor Forest Reserve and Kuala Gula.
SELANGOR:

AMPANG FOREST RECREATION AREA

The 10ha Ampang Forest Recreational Area was established in 1983. Its special features are the beautiful rapids, and forests ideal for bathing and picnicking. The area is part of the five sq km of the catchment area for the Ampang impounding reservoir that was constructed in 1892; i.e. one of the earliest waterworks in the country.

Ampang Forest Reserve is one of the pockets of lowland forests near urban centers. However, like other areas it is under intense pressure from development and this island of natural lowland forests is shrinking rapidly.

KAMPUNG KUANTAN MAN- GROVES

The most important attraction in Kampung Kuantan is watching fireflies at night. Using rowing boats, the villagers proudly take you to see one of nature's wonders — millions of fireflies flashing in synchrony.

Life jackets are provided and you are even insured against accidents. Rowing boats are used because they are more eco-friendly.

Nevertheless, the existence of this natural wonder is in serious threat caused by pollution and poor mitigation management.

OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Batu Caves, Bagan Wak soda Omar Beach, Bagan Lalang Beach, TEMpler Park, Sungai Congkak

Amenity Forest, Pulau Indah, Sungai Buluh Forest Reserve, North Selangor Peat Swamp, Raja Musa Forest Reserve, Sungai Tekala Recreational Forest, Semenyih Dam, FRIM Kepong Forest Reserve, Paya Indah Wetland Sanctuary and Ulu Gombak Forest Reserve.

KUALA LUMPUR:

BUKIT NANAS WILDLIFE RESERVE, KUALA LUMPUR

The Bukit Nanas Wildlife Reserve, Kuala Lumpur, was gazetted in 1934 and is located on a 16ha hill in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. Before 1934, it was already gazetted and became operational as a forest reserve on August 28, 1906. Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve is classified as a recreational forest on July 29, 1970. The Kuala Lumpur Tower is located within this reserve.

OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Bukit Sungai Putih Forest Reserve and Golf Club Wildlife Reserve (occupied by the Royal Selangor Golf Club).

NEGERI SEMBILAN

ANGSI FOREST RESERVE

An area of 157ha within the 12,349ha of Angsi Forest Reserve has been classified as "Angsi Virgin Jungle Reserve" under the UNEP WCMC Protected Area Program. A recreational park known as "Ulu Bendul Recreational Forest" that was first opened in 1972, is located at compartments 45 and 52 of this Angsi Forest Reserve.

Gunung Angsi (925m) is one of the prime attractions of this Recreational Forest.

We can start the hike up by following the Betang Terachai river which flows through the middle of the forest reserve. Trekking to the summit will take about three hours. Trekkers will come across the pristine Jeraum Kali Lang waterfalls after about 40 minutes on the trail.

MALACCA:

AIR KEROH AMENITY FOREST

Air Keroi is the "Green Belt" of Melaka where forests and trees over hundreds of years old are being gazetted at the Air Keroi Recreational Forest. Air Keroi Recreational Forest is located 11km from the Melaka city centre on the Air Keroi highway.

If you are driving from Kuala Lumpur, leave the North-South Expressway at the Air Keroi exit. The recreational forest is approximately opposite the Melaka Village Resort. If you are from the city, take the road to Air Keroi.

Forest has been left untouched to enable visitors to experience nature at its best. Trees are labelled. Routes are marked.

AIR KEROH MINI SAFARI

The 1.5ha Mini Safari is located right at the centre of the Melaka Zoo compound. There are more than 80 exotic animals from 16 species roaming freely on the beautifully undulating slopes of the safari.

The green landscape is complemented by two ponds and man-made streams, with more than 80 exotic animals from 16 different species. Developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Department, the safari was opened to the public in November 2000.

OTHER POPULAR SITES:
Pulau Besar and Tanjung Tuan.

(To be continued: More ecotourism destinations in Malaysia)