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DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN PERAK TENGAH DISTRICT BASED ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Perak Tengah District has much cultural heritage potential to promote, notably in terms of village life, arts, culture, and agriculture. In order to be beneficial to the community, additional efforts should be encouraged to draw tourists to Perak, and the new attraction should be carefully defined and interpreted, especially in rural regions. Unfortunately, there is not enough support for the tourism industry's infrastructure, and the services are still not up to par. The Local Plan 2013, which promotes tourist-related products in Perak Tengah, is the foundation of the proposal to boost tourism there. This is consistent with the policies outlined in the Perak State Plan, which emphasises Perak Tengah's tourism products and integrated growth as a Perak tourism attraction. Focus group discussions with local agencies will be used in this study's qualitative research, which will be used to examine the rural development in the Perak Tengah District. The study begins by identifying the person in charge of change for each administrative area. This study is divided into five (5) main sections: the tourist destination, the tourist product, the tourist activities, the promotion of tourism, and the infrastructure for tourists, particularly in the administrative district. Based on the findings of this study, it was found that there are various potentials that local authorities can highlight. The suggestions and perceptions expressed that rural tourism can revive and improve the tourism economy in Perak Tengah.

Keyword: Rural Tourism, Tourism Product, Local Authority, Perak Tengah District

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INTRODUCTION

The tourist industry is one of Malaysia's most significant contributors to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), with numerous destinations in Malaysia, such as major cities, which have witnessed tremendous efforts to boost the tourism industry (Chiun, 2019). Apart from cities, rural tourism has the potential to be a good product for marketing the country and involving the community in the travel business, also revitalising the rural economy and, in particular, the development of a value-added commercial channel for local produce (Amir, Ghapar & Jamal 2015; Liu, 2006). In Malaysia, rural tourism helps the government increase job opportunities and eradicate poverty in the communities, assisting communities in generating income and economic booster for rural destinations (Amir et al., 2015; Chin, 2022). Furthermore, the majority of visitors who come to developing nations are usually interested in cultural or heritage-based tourism, as developing countries have plentiful and mainly unexploited natural and resource resources that supply the elements required for culture and heritage-based tourism (Chiun, 2019).

This study aims to develop a tourism product as attraction, accommodation, food and beverage, destination, activities, and ancillary services, which have been identified as attracting tourists and having a major impact on overall tourist expenditure in previous studies (Chiun, 2019). According to Isa (2020), every improvement or modification that is to be done towards any of the city elements must undergo a proper channel and adhere to improvement or modification steps that design experts have proposed to create harmony between the city elements with their surroundings and further will be able to form an image that has identity, structure and meaning. Other subsystems, such as infrastructure, health, education, and the environment, should not be neglected. This is in line with the objective of the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) of rural revitalization and to decrease the migration of rural youth from rural areas (Harun & Mat Zin, 2018) as specified in the government's strategic strategy through the recognition of potential tourism products to be promoted (Amir et al., 2015). Rural tourism encompasses several critical factors related to nature, heritage, community traditions, and traditional customs that can be found in rural places with a small population. Rural tourism is a complimentary option to traditional economic activities such as agriculture, farming, and other significant sectors in some places, in terms of diversity of activities. Also, the diversity of rural cultures between countries creates opportunities for appealing and competitive tourism products (Mapjabil, Sipatau & Rahman, 2020). The products might maximize asset utilisation to benefit the community involved (Taufik et al., 2021).

Rural Tourism at Perak Tengah District

The cluster was designed in accordance with tourism clusters by Perak State Plan 2040 Gopeng – Kampar – Batu Gajah cluster is the nearest to Perak Tengah District. Based on geography, visitors can easily explore tourism products in Perak Tengah because it is located on a route that can be linked to nearby cities and tourist attractions such as Parit - Seri Iskandar – Kampung Gajah – Pasir Salak. Unfortunately, these attractions are not well-publicised and inadequate support for tourism infrastructure and services is still unsatisfactory (Harun,2018).

The proposal to strengthen tourism in Perak Tengah is based on the Local Plan 2013, promoting tourism products in Perak Tengah (Harun,2018). This is in line with Perak State’s Plan strategies of preserving heritage assets and integrated development as a Perak tourism attraction emphasising the products tourism of Perak Tengah such as Rumah Dato Maharajalela, Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak, Batu Peringatan J.W.W Birch, Pasir Salak and Masjid Pasir Salak (PLANMalaysia, 2019). However, in Official websites of Tourism Perak only promoted Pasir Salak Historical Complex as a heritage tourism product but left out other Perak Tengah tourism products comprehensively (Tourism Perak, 2022).

Table 1: Type of tourism and products in Perak Tengah

Type of tourism	Tourism Products	Unit/No
Heritage	i. Museum	24
	ii. Royal Tomb	
	iii. Handicraft	
	iv. Place	
Agriculture	v. Agriculture products	3
Eco-Tourism	vi. Preservation and conservation	2
Education	vii. Local Universities	42
	viii. Private Universities	
	ix. Schools	
Services	x. Food and Beverages	184
	xi. Shopping	
	xii. Accommodation	
	xiii. Bank and Finance	
Recreation	xiv. Sports	4
Total		259

Source: Author,2022

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Tourism Products

The scope of tourism promoted in rural areas is vast and varied in nature. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines product tourism as a combination of tangible and intangible elements such as natural, cultural, and artificial resources, facilities, services, and activities centred on a specific point of interest that forms the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience, including emotional aspects (Vengesai, 2003). Rural tourism incorporates local products and cultural elements into tourism (Lane, 2009; Liu, 2006), which resulting multifaceted activity that includes farm-based tourism, eco-tourism and heritage tourism refer to Figure 1 (Chiun, 2019; Mapjabil et al., 2020; Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam et al., 2015).

Heritage tourism is leisure travel with the primary goal of visiting places and activities associated with the past (Harun, 2018; Lane, 2009). Some areas include educational travel, arts, and ethnic tourism (Lane, 2009). Then, eco-tourism is visiting natural regions to appreciate the landscape, including plant and animal biodiversity. Nature-based tourism can be passive, in which visitors merely observe nature, or active, in which visitors participate in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities. Rural tourism has developed as a worthwhile alternative to agriculture in rural areas (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005). Agritourism refers to going to a functioning farm or other agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness activity for enjoyment, education, or active participation in the farm's or operation's activities. (Chiun, 2019; Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Lane, 2009). In Malaysia, homestay programmes are also one of the rural tourism which tourists are accommodated in a village with a local family, allowing them to learn about the local lifestyle, culture, and natural environment (Chiun, 2019; Muslim, Numata, & Yahya, 2017; Nair et al., 2015).

Furthermore, rural tourism can be promoted locally with the help of local government and local firms, and it is not always dependent on outside organisations or businesses. Although tourism can be costly to establish in some circumstances, such as resorts or when huge companies and franchises are involved, rural tourism can be promoted with minimal credit, training, or capital. As a result, rural tourism may be less expensive to develop compared to other economic development initiatives. Tourists benefit from two categories of small companies in rural areas: (1) those that are actively involved in tourism, such as hotels or attractions, and (2) those that are indirectly linked, such as retail and shopping. (Che Aziz, Hashim & Awang, 2018; Wilson, Fesenmaier, & Van et al, 2001)

Key Factors of Rural Tourism

Attraction and uniqueness, whether natural or man-made elements both within and adjacent to a community, are the first critical criteria for the success of rural tourism (Che Aziz et al., 2018; Chiun, 2019; Wilson et al., 2001). According to research, there is a potential to create unique experiences and highlight the essential components of the destination's culture, history, and local way of life that distinguish it from the rest of the tourism world (Che Aziz et al., 2018). Visitors' senses will be stimulated by cultural events, resulting in amusing and informative experiences (Che Aziz et al., 2018).

Secondly, the development of tourism infrastructures such as access facilities and transportation, which are roads, airports, trains, and buses, water and power services, parking, signs, and recreation facilities (Wilson et al., 2001). Chiun (2019) emphasised success factors for rural tourism accessibilities. Rural locations far from urban areas are referred to as location features (Mapjabil et al., 2020). Road and transportation infrastructure enables access to tourism sites, boosts regional business activity, and benefits the local community by strengthening accessibility of existing tourism activities, attracting new tourists and promoting new tourism (Kanwal, Rasheed, Pitafi et al., 2020). Infrastructure is a necessary component of any tourism development. We may increase destination accessibility and qualities by constructing infrastructure favouring destination marketing and recommendations. Increased tourist intake to rural tourism results from infrastructure development (Kumar, Valeri & Shekhar., 2022; Wilson et al., 2001).

Services as a second input driver concern this because the attraction itself does not always draw tourists, even though the destination provides a focal point for many tourist activities and is vital for tourist locations competing for tourist expenditure (Giambona & Grassini, 2020; Naidoo & Ramseook-munhurrin, 2011). Otherwise, support facilities should be developed not just for residents but also for visitors/tourists' benefit. Due to limited access to these facilities, most of the tourists also stressed the significance of developing public facilities such as restrooms, shower rooms, and prayer rooms in rural tourism attractions. They believed that if appropriate facilities could be developed and managed, the number of tourists would rise, which would support the growth of rural tourism. (Che Aziz et al., 2018). Others, services such as lodging, restaurants, and the various retail businesses needed to take care of tourists' needs. Food services are required in rural areas to serve the tourists.

Rural tourism recognises that environmental conditions are critical to the industry's success. Everywhere, people are aware that they must be environmentally responsible and vigilant. Cleanliness, and nature preservation, like maintaining authenticity and diversity, must be as unique as possible. The concept of resilience brings a unique and contemporary perspective to the

approach to sustainable development. It focuses on existing vulnerabilities and immediate threats to social and environmental norms that are considered acceptable (Che Aziz et al., 2018; Chiun, 2019; Wilson et al., 2001)

Other than that, promoting and marketing tourism attractions to potential tourists (Chiun, 2019; Wilson et al., 2001). In marketing tourism destinations, the use of tourist information boards has grown significantly. The planning and inspiration stages of the consumer journey are of utmost importance, and tourist marketers strive to engage clients at pertinent touch points (Gross & Huber, 2020). Else, the importance of innovation and technology in service sectors, promotion, and marketing. Innovation in tourism has increased in the last few years, and it is important to highlight the awareness of innovation of technologies (Amir, Dura, Yusof et al., 2020), especially in the rural tourism industry. Rural locations are becoming increasingly popular among urban inhabitants, and promoting rural destinations is in desperate need of improvement and the urge to implement smart tourism (Che Aziz et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study will be using qualitative research by using focus group discussions with the local agencies and focusing on the rural development in Perak Tengah District. The study establishes a stakeholder by identifying the person in charge of each administrative area. The stakeholder groups were: Chief/Head of the Mukim ten (10) and Tourism Agencies three (3). Each interviewee was assigned an alphanumeric code (R1 to R13) for credentials; the interviewee's information is shown in Table 2. The selection of the respondents for the focus group discussion was by purposive sampling and the best position to provide the information required. The method describes as “an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants typically but can be anywhere between five and above depending on the purpose of the study, and led by a trained moderator and converging on the specific issues that have been outlined (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Several attempts were made to contact each of these individuals via telephone and email. In the end, thirteen key informants above agreed to participate in the focus group discussion, which was conducted face to face at Dewan Cempaka 1, D’ Hotel Seri Iskandar, on 12th September 2022. The meeting starts with explaining the site background and initial findings to the participants. The questionnaire was open-ended in order to gain spontaneous opinions and avoid potential bias. The discussion was conducted in an informal situation by written notes and researchers' key points in paper and map assistance. The study focuses on the diversity of the stakeholder groups based on their understanding and perceptions of their administration areas. The questionnaire framework was divided into five (5) parts. Part A consists of eight questions about the tourism destination; Part B consists of two questions about tourism products; Part C

contains two questions about tourism activities; Part D covers five questions about tourism promotion. Part E entails two questions of accessibility and infrastructure in their administrative area.

Table 2: Interviewees' Information

Interviewees	Interviewees' Position / Agencies
R1	Penghulu Tertinggi
R2	Kementerian Pelancongan dan Kebudayaan Malaysia Negeri Perak
R3	Penghulu Mukim Belanja
R4	Tourism@Perak
R5	Penghulu Mukim Bota
R6	Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Pembangunan, Majlis Daerah Perak Tengah
R7	Penghulu Mukim Layang-Layang
R8	Penghulu Mukim Kampong Gajah
R9	Penghulu Mukim Pulau Tiga
R10	Penghulu Mukim Pasir Panjang Ulu
R11	Penghulu Mukim Pasir Salak
R12	Penghulu Kanan
R13	Penghulu Mukim Kota Setia

Study Area

Perak Tengah District has many products with tourist potential that can be converted into rural tourism. The Perak Tengah District Local Plan 2013 proposes methods to strengthen and utilise all tourism potentials in the rural area, mainly historical and farm-based activities (Perak Tengah District Councils, 2018). The plan also specifies that all tourism activities must be accompanied by sufficient infrastructure to benefit visitors. For this study, the feedback from all representatives based on the administrative block planning Perak Tengah was considered (Figure 2). The key idea for tourism strengthening in the Plan is to promote contemporary cultural resources, promote the Pasir Salak Historical Complex, promote handicraft industries, and develop royal tombs as tourist attractions. According to a recent study by Harun (2018), there are numerous potential attractions in the district that each have their own identity and are positioned along a route that can be linked to allow visitors to explore the area easily. Unfortunately, these attractions are not well-publicized and do not have adequate on-site support. In Perak Tengah District, the research area includes three types of tourism based on rural tourism products: agritourism, eco-tourism, and heritage tourism. All of these should be prioritised for promotion as new tourism products.

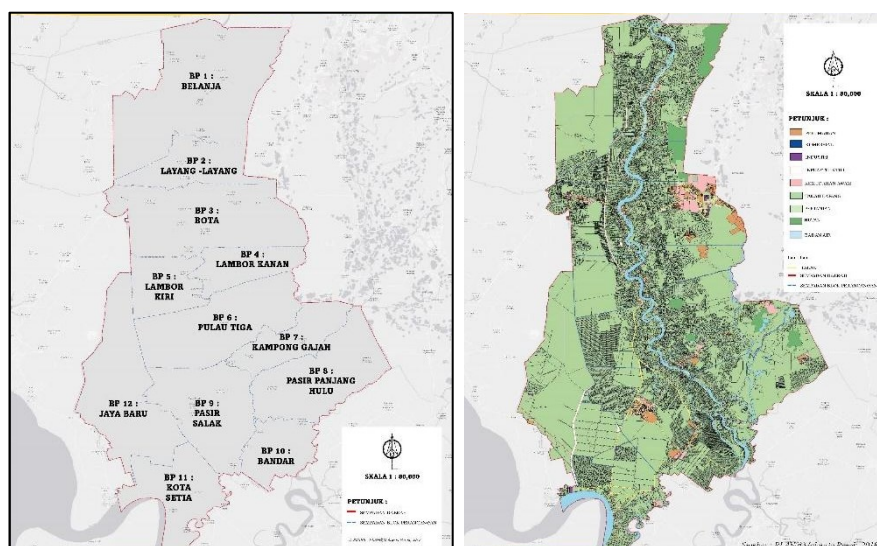


Figure 2: Development Block and Land Use of Perak Tengah District.
 Source: PLAN@Malaysia Perak, 2019

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study established thirteen (13) stakeholders for discussing Rural Tourism Development in Perak Tengah District. An interesting outcome relating to the tourism development in Perak Tengah requires further explanation and identification. For example, on main tourism and products, one of the respondents specify;

“In Bota, there are tombs of Sultans such as Sultan Muzaffar Shah 1 and 3, Sultan Alauddin as well as a cultural village, Pulau Misa, an indigenous village and many traditional Kutai or Limas houses, as well as a tuntung conservation centre. Every Saturday, a morning market attracts visitors from outside, such as Batu Gajah and Manjung. In addition, Dataran Sungai Seluang, close to UiTM Seri Iskandar, Taman Tasik Iskandar, near the MDPT office, and in terms of food, there is Bubur Perak, which serves 12 types of porridge, including Mee Ali, a special dish at Bota, and Sate Bota”. (R5)

Meanwhile, on the aspect of a potential location, one of the interesting findings from this study stated;

“Ikan Sangkar Jamil or Jamil Agrofarm in Kampung Tengah. A little far from Pekan Parit. This is a farmed cage fish product. This is the speciality of Sungai Perak because there are many cage fish farmers; if developed, it can also become a centre of attraction and atmosphere that visitors can enjoy. Others include accommodation, Lanai Cempaka Sari and in addition RISDA Homestay. This RISDA homestay is under the RISDA cooperation, a suitable place in terms of cleanliness and for tourism”. (R3)

Additional to the above statement, one of the respondents mention the potential products;

“Sungai Perak and Paddy fields are the main tourism products that should be promoted. The length of Sungai Perak is 92 km, from Mukim Belanja to Mukim Kampung Gajah. However, there are not many activities that have an impact on tourism. Such fishing and boat tours use small boats. Second, paddy fields. Paddy fields could be potentially developed as agrotourism or Sukan Bendang. It's such sports activities that are popular in Hulu Perak. We could draft a tourism calendar and put it as our new signature events”. (R1)

With these perspectives, the promotion method should be reviewed as stated;

“Most operators use social media such as Facebook and Instagram, and the best promotion is word of mouth (mulut ke mulut). For example, if parents indirectly send their children to educational institutions, they will go shopping. Tourism products enable them to travel in the surrounding area. They will tell others if the place provides a different satisfaction/experience. That is important for us to provide good service, good hospitality, and good products. It will make repeat tourism”. (R4)

“Among the biggest efforts that have been made, we sent or introduced this product at prestigious events, competitions, or exhibitions such as at MAHA (Doosoon@ Farm) and Pulau Misa to participate in Cultural Competitions up to the international level. Pulau Misa group has represented Malaysia to participate in the competition in Dubai”. (R5)

Following the justification from above, the final effort by authorities for promotions must be considered as stated;

“At the local authorities, MDPT, there is a tourism unit. These units discussed tourism management matters and tourism products

shortcomings, and the direction to develop the tourism area. Tourism cannot stand alone; it requires collaborative planning. It will also require support from all agencies, products, MOTAC, Tourism@Perak and other technical departments. It requires data on tourism products such as food, handicrafts, etc. Otherwise, the business operators also need to cooperate to make a successful tourism destination”. (R4)

“The entrepreneurs themselves will promote each product; however, there are also initiatives from agencies to promote products. For example, MDPT tries to collect the highlighted tourism products to be included in FUN MAP through caricature drawing (comic) in collaboration with artists. This effort shows local authorities' commitment to developing Perak Tengah as one of the tourism destinations in Perak. Else, promoted in Media Social and official Website of Perak Tengah District Councils”. (R6)

Table 3 below shows each administrative and local agency's responses to Rural Tourism Development in Perak Tengah District. The statements show that every one of them has a different perspective on the strength and weaknesses of their administrative areas.

Table 3: Responses on Rural Tourism Development in Perak Tengah District.

Summary	Respondent
In conclusion, Perak Tengah has equal qualities to be promoted as rural tourism. This is because Perak Tengah includes several key factors related to nature, heritage, community traditions, and traditional customs that can be found in rural places. Tourism in Perak Tengah has many strengths, such as heritages, eco-tourism, recreation, and agrotourism. These strengths can be seen within 11 Mukim in Perak Tengah exempted Mukim Jaya Baru. However, several Mukims do not have main tourism destinations such as Mukim Layang – Layang and Mukim Pasir Panjang Hulu.	R1 R3 R5 R6 R7 R8 R9 R10 R11
Heritage elements can be found in every mukim except Mukim Layang – Layang. Heritage's elements can be categorised as buildings such as Menara Jam Parit, Rumah Kutai, Kompleks Pasir Salak, Replica house of Dato' Maharaja Lela and Laman Budaya Amphitheatre and royal tombs. Other than that, handicrafts such as Labu Tampil, Orang Asli handicraft and Aznah Songket. Some are intangible, such as food and cultural activities.	R5 R6 R9 R11
Regarding eco-tourism, Pusat Konservasi Tuntung is a tourism destination in Perak Tengah. Government agencies have made many efforts to ensure the rare species of Tuntung survive.	R5 R6

<p>Furthermore, Agro tourism is a significant type of tourism in Perak Tengah as most of the mukim have paddy fields and Sungai Perak. The most highlighted agro-tourism is cage fish farming, especially in Mukim Belanja (Ikan Sangkar Jamil) and Mukim Pulau Tiga (Pulau Tiga MYKP), Mukim Kota Setia (Ternakan Udang Galah). Other activities include chicken farming (Dosoan Sara Farm Ayam) and rabbits (MAWI Rabbit Farm). These generate local incomes and potentially highlight tourism in Perak Tengah.</p>	<p>R3 R9 R10</p>
<p>Next, Perak Tengah has sports and recreation activities known in Kampung Gajah. Litar Dato' Sagor is highlighted for motorsports activities. Else, outdoor sport hiking activities in Bukit Tunggul, Mukim Kampung Gajah.</p>	<p>R8</p>
<p>Other than that, some potential locations are only discovered by the local community and not promoted by authorities and tourism players. Some places have a good response from tourists even though it has not been highlighted by any tourism agencies, such as Ikan Sangkar Jamil in Mukim Belanja, Boat Fishing activities in Mukim Bandar and Mukim Kota Setia. It seems underrated as the authorities and tourism agencies only focus on existing products. In addition, some industry players do not show interest in making the royal tombs become one tourism product as they are irrelevant and unprofitable. Meanwhile, Laman Budaya Amphitheatre is abandoned without any planning.</p>	<p>R1 R2 R3 R4 R5 R6 R11 R12</p>
<p>Besides that, the activities to boost tourism in Perak Tengah are very low. There are no signature events such as festivals, sports tournaments, or annual activities. Sungai Perak and Paddy fields are the main tourism products that should be promoted. Paddy fields could be potentially developed for annual events such as Sukan Bendang. Meanwhile, boat touring and fishing activities should be encouraged for river activities in Sungai Perak. Other cultural activities such as Pertandingan Rebana in Mukim Pasir Salak. The activities and events could support tourism in Perak Tengah, especially at Mukim, which had fewer tourism products.</p>	<p>R2 R3 R4 R8 R10 R11</p>
<p>From the discussion, tourism products are the strength of mukim, which do not have tourism destinations such as Mukim Layang-Layang and Mukim Pasir Panjang Hulu. Some Mukim in Perak Tengah, which do not have many tourism destinations, have several tourism products such as SME which generate local incomes. Some of these products have a good market within state level, national level and internationally.</p>	<p>R7 R8 R9 R12 R13</p>
<p>Regarding tourism promotion, most of the products are promoted by the operator. The most popular platforms are by using social media such as Facebook and Instagram.</p>	<p>R1 R4 R5 R6 R7</p>

<p>Others, promotion from word of mouth. However, this promotion is only for those who have experience going to Perak Tengah.</p> <p>In addition, efforts from local authorities and agencies brought the tourism products in the prestige exhibitions such as at MAHA (Doosoon@Farm) and Pulau Misa to participate in Cultural Competitions and represented Malaysia to participate in the competition in Dubai. Yet, the promotion responses are still unsatisfactory as it only gives impact in certain products. Collaboration between agencies is essential.</p> <p>Some products are not ready to be mass promotions as they cannot make an effort to commit to supply and demand. This is because of financial problems and insufficient raw materials, especially for rare products such as Teh Berembang, popularised in Mukim Kota Setia, and Buah Kanta in Kampung Gajah.</p>	<p>R8 R9 R10 R11</p>
<p>Lastly, the adequacy of support facilities and infrastructures. Some tourism destinations such as Parit Town have a problem managing the parking areas because of the scarcity of land.</p> <p>Others, accessibility for Pulau Misa in Mukim Lambor Kiri, is built on private property, and some do not have a proper entrance or facilities. This will require time and cost to develop infrastructure and facilities such as roads including public toilets, water, and electricity supply</p> <p>Else, the availability of signages. This is because some of the products are not usually located in the main road areas, particularly for accommodation, agrotourism and food and beverage, mainly in Mukim Pulau Tiga and Mukim Pasir Panjang Hulu.</p> <p>In addition, the problems are highlighted for river activities. The main issues are the security management for tourism is problematic, especially for visitor safety, as some of the operators may have problems in terms of licence and management. Otherwise, many river activities do not have enough facilities such as jetty and accessibility, such as in Mukim Bandar, Mukim Pasir Panjang Hulu and Mukim Kota Setia.</p>	<p>R1 R3 R6 R7 R9 R11 R10 R12 R13</p>
<p>VR is a trend and innovative technology for promotions and marketing tools. However, VR could only show as a video with some information for the public to imagine or visualise the tourism products. However, the argument of content and information needs to be formatted as a promotion which does not swiftly change to virtual tourism. This is because tourism's nature is to experience and present it physically.</p>	<p>R1 R4 R5 R7 R9 R10 R11</p>

The urges for the public to come and visit physically for legit experiences and feels directly of the tourism products. Indirectly, could generate incomes for locals for tourists to spend in terms of food and beverages, accommodations, trade, and services. Moreover, VR may be trendy among young people or millennials, and age gaps may affect the preference of VR in tourism.	
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Source: Focus Group Discussion (2022)

CONCLUSION

This study began by understanding the fundamental tourism and the operational method in Perak Tengah with the stakeholders involved. Based on the findings, the study concludes that there is much potential in every part of Perak Tengah. Each part of mukim has its uniqueness and attraction. It is a matter of how this product can be enhanced to its full potential. The different concerns of the stakeholders may be explained through their dependency on the activities and development. The agency should further explore collaborative impact assessment on the tourism involved for the improvement and tourism economy development.

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