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SPECTACULAR ISLAND TOURISM IN PULAU AMAN, PENANG MALAYSIA: THE VISITORS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Island tourism initiative plays a significant role in uplifting economic activity for the island and local people. The equilibrium point of view between service providers and visitors is essential. Therefore, visitors' perspective is crucial in understanding the need and requirement for establishment in tourist spots, including islands. This study examines visitors' perception of the study area through 3 main elements: activity, social and physical, comfortable, and natural beauty. The research design uses a descriptive analysis approach that uses a 5-point Likert scale, namely strongly agree (SA), agree (A), not sure (NS), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). As for research analysis, the study used the SPSS program and specifically focused on frequency, mean, mode, median and level of agreement as to expected output. Preliminary findings indicate that visitors strongly agree that the area has the potential to be developed as a top tourism spot with minor improvement facilities and eco-tourism products.

Keywords: Island tourism, Pulau Aman, Visitor Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Island tourism (Saad & Rahman, 2021) has substantial potential economic activity in offering many exclusive products and services from inland areas, beaches and marine areas. Latip et al. (2018) indicate that conservation efforts will ensure the viability and relevancy of the target tourism zoning. UNWTO (2023) suggests that island tourism is exclusive to their unique geographical situation, and their natural and cultural heritage richness makes them unique for visitors. However, simultaneously, it confronts them with several challenges and vulnerabilities. Islands are the most vulnerable and fragile of tourism destinations and will experience even more pressure as the combined impacts of economic, social and environmental change accelerate in the future (Carlsen & Butler, 2011). Many efforts have been made by government and non-government organisations, from locally to globally, to mitigate the issue arising from the island tourism area. Strengthening island tourism products made by the authority and relevant stakeholders ensures the agenda is implemented up to the desired standard. Moreover, the standard need to be verified by end users or traveller to the area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism (Talebi, 2017) sector began showing increased activity and visitor visits to famous destinations before the pandemic until the endemic. Domestic tourism (Nyaupane et al. 2020), inbound tourism (Wong, 2013) and outbound tourism (Jin & Wang, 2016) initially indicate the tourist movement at an increasing pattern. However, some constraints cause the operation of providing tourism facilities cannot be carried out to the maximum levels. The government has announced granting special assistance to more than 20 thousand tourism operators registered under the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) for three months with an allocation of RM 85 million (MOTAC, 2022). This provision was made to fill the gap to maximise and develop Malaysia's tourism sector affected and suffered a severe downturn due to the pandemic that the WHO declared on 11 March 2020, and Malaysia was no exception. With the help of MOTAC, the Malaysian government has formulated a strategy to deal with and reduce the effects of this decline by focusing on domestic tourism. However, there is a high gap in the annual projections for 2019 (RM103.2 billion), 2020 (RM40.4) and 2021 (RM18.4), with the injection of funds from the government and the opening of the country's borders to foreign tourists. Therefore, the government expects the projection in 2022 to increase to the maximum level. As a result, domestic tourism spending nosedive 54.5 per cent to a record RM18.4 billion (2020: RM40.4 billion), the lowest since this survey started in 2008 (The Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Various initiatives are mobilised to advance the tourism sector, including the search for islands in Malaysia with high tourism value.

Malaysia is famous for islands tourism (Yusof & Ismail, 2016), products with a very high value in authenticity and uniqueness. Either, either stand or in the water around the island. According to the guidelines of the Malaysian Town and Country Planning Department, there are four categories of islands. Table 1 indicates the island category under the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia.

Table 1: Island Category in Malaysia.

Category	Statement
Development Island	Development islands include islands with one or both of the following criteria: • have an area of more than 90 km. Square the number of inhabitants exceeds 20,000 people, or • are the most important islands that drive the national economy and have various development plans to improve the local and national economy. For example, Langkawi Island and Labuan Island.
Resort Island/Tourist Destination Island	A resort island or tourist destination island is an island that has the potential to be developed as an international and local centre. Tourism is characteristic of this resort or tourist destination island islands where a large part of the local economy depends on the tourism sector; • famous in the country and abroad and become the focus of tourism; and • has natural resources and attractions. For example, Pangkor Island and Jerejak Island.
Marine Park Island	A marine park is an area of marine waters zoned two nautical miles (3.7 km) from the lowest low tide mark, except for Kapas Island in Terengganu, Kuraman Island, Rusukan Besar Island and Rusukan Kecil Island in Labu, an which are zoned one nautical mile from the low tide mark the lowest. The gazette was made under the Fisheries Act 1985 (Act 317) through the Malaysian Marine Park Establishment Order 1994.
Uninhabited Island	An uninhabited island is an island that has no permanent inhabitants and can be shaped like rocks, shoals, ridges, and coral reefs. Immediate action should be taken to name and gazette the islands in question.

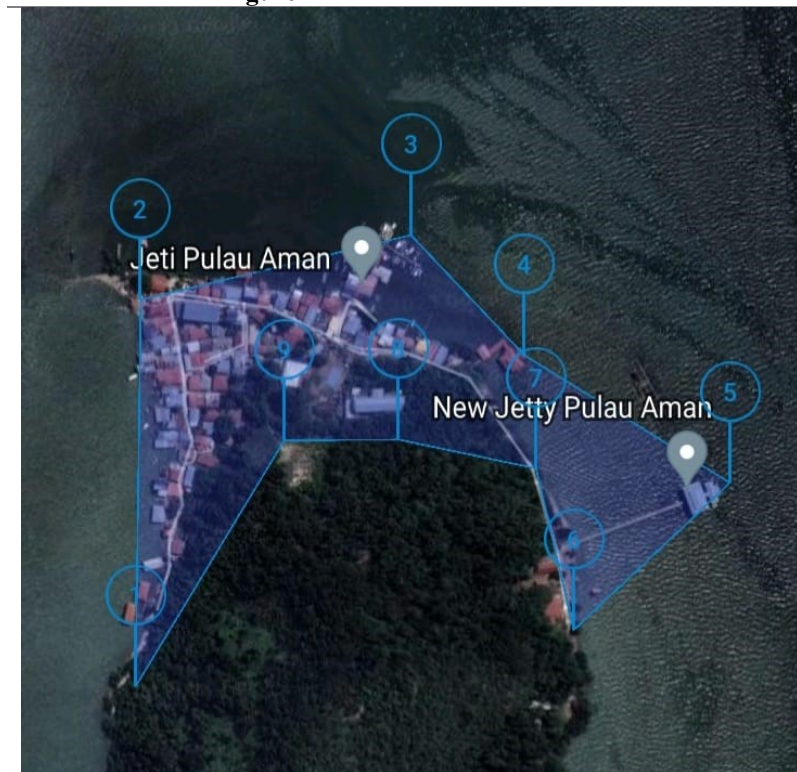
Source: JPBD, (2015)

As the chosen study area, based on Guidelines for Islands and Marine Parks by the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia 2015 (JPBD, 2015), Pulau Aman is initially under the category of development island. Possesses both island tourism products and rural development criteria, the island has the characteristics and potential to be developed based on marine life, and beaches, including a natural area and beautiful scenery. Not to mention the island tourism product to be explored.

Study Area

Known as the ‘Island of Peace, Pulau Aman is home to a traditional Malay village with a population of less than 300 and is considered one of the hidden gems in Seberang Perai, Penang (Akmal, 2020). The primary activities on the island include fishing and island tourism activities, namely, a boat ride to the fish farms nearby, kayaking, team building activities, jungle trekking, and camping (Akmal, 2020). Ecotourism (Mohamed & Hussin, 2006) activity dictated most of the island’s arrival. Some worked in the Small and Medium Scale Industries (IKS), such as processing marine products, the c; they make chips, breadfruit, and homestay.

Figure 1: Location site of Pulau Aman



Source: Authors, (2023)

Pulau Aman and inhabited atoll Pulau Gedung – Pulau Aman was occupied by the Bugis ethnic group of Kedah in 1817 and has been a rural fishing community ever since. (Ferrarese, 2022) Pulau Aman covers about 288 acres, and 95% of the island, equal to 284 acres, is still surrounded by forest. The place is the gateway to tranquillity and serenity. Pulau Aman is an idyllic Malay fishing village with Malaysia's oldest Sukun (breadfruit) tree. Pulau Aman is reachable

by ferry boat from the pier at Bukit Tambun. The main activities of its inhabitants include fishing and ecotourism. There is a Malay village on Pulau Aman. The houses are clustered together near the coast. A network of paths wraps itself around the town. There are many attractions in Pulau Aman, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Current Attraction in Pulau Aman.

Item	Statement
History of Telaga Emas	At the Jalan Telaga Emas, it will lead you to an old well dating back to 1789. This well is unique because it never runs dry, even during the worst drought, and its water remains fresh even when mixed with seawater. Many visitors draw water from the well to bathe in as it is believed to bring them good luck.
The oldest Sukun Tree in Malaysia	Mardi declares this tree as the oldest Sukun Tree or <i>Artocarpus altilis</i> (Rojas & Acevedo, 2022) in Malaysia, planted around 1890 by a Tok Guru Al-Quran, Tok Awang Bin Akid. The Buah Sukun tree is almost 120 years old but bears many fruits.
Fishing heaven	Pulau Aman is the best place for fishing using fishing rods or fishing nets. Many fishing enthusiasts will rent a homestay with a verandah facing the sea and start fishing.
Restaurant Terapung Pulau Aman	Pulau Aman is well known as a heaven for prawn noodle enthusiasm. The fresh prawn and the delicious dishes make Pulau Aman an attraction Islands.

Source: CTFA, (2015), Ferrarese, (2022 and Akmal, (2020)

METHODOLOGY

The research design approach is non-experimental, with descriptive research focusing on quantitative data. A random sampling technique (Evans, 2022) initiates the target population. Visitors depart at the main jetty area Pulau Aman use as respondents, and questionnaires form data collection with 19 variables as a core instrument to the research. The questionnaire discovered the impact of systematic management (Latip et al., 2020) towards visitors, tourists, and residents. It was divided into three sections demographic profile, an indicator of development and satisfaction level of respondents toward conservation at Pulau Aman based on a 5-point Likert scale analysis for the agreeable index, namely strongly agree (SA), agree(A), not sure (NS), disagree (DS) and strongly disagree (SD), initiate the visitor's perspective toward their visiting experience. An average of 15-20 minutes is used to finish the questionnaire. A total of 78 respondents cooperates during the interview session. The descriptive analysis uses to interpret the roar data from the questions. Descriptive analysis (Kemp et

al. 2017), namely means, median, frequency and Likert scale analysis used to analyse the pattern of visitors' perspectives toward the place they visit.

ANALYSIS AND FINDING

Table 3 indicates eight variables to lighten up the condition of the current situation on the visitor demographics profile, namely gender, age, education, income, employment, visitors' origin, the purpose of visit and type of companion. Statistically, the mean reading is 1.35; more than 50 per cent of males visit the island and 79.4 per cent of males aged 31-41. As for ages, the mean reading is 2.7821 and the highest percentage of the ages between 31-41 years with 6 at cent, followed by generations between 21-30 years at 32.1 and the rest at 24.4 per cent. For the education levels, the mean reading was 1.8974, and most of the arrival possesses a cert or diploma at 51.3 per cent. Followed by the secondary level at 29.5 per cent and the rest is 19.2 per cent. As for income, the mean reading at 3.3718, and the highest ranges from RM3000-RM4000 with 42.3 per cent. Out of that, 55 cents are certificate and diploma holders. Visitor origin indicates that most are local, with mean readings at 1.2179 and frequency at 79.5 per cent. As for visit purposes, the highest percentage is for gastronomy activity at 37.2 per cent, followed by recreational activity at 28.2 per cent. The rest is below 25 per cent, with a mean reading of 2.7949.

Most of them visit the island with a group of below five people at 65.4 per cent, with 44.8 per cent eager to enjoy the gastronomy variety, especially authentic and tasty prawn noodles or "Mee Udang" floating restaurant in Pulau Aman. As for the recreational activities in Pulau Aman, fifty per cent of respondents agree, followed by 23.7 per cent who strongly agree about the statement, "There are many recreational activities in Pulau Aman". During the week, many people come to this island to do activities such as fishing or bicycling. On the other hand, 7.2 per cent of the respondents disagree. There is a lack of activities that people can do around this island since there is no maintenance on the facilities that are prepared on the island 15.8 per cent of the respondents are not sure about the statement because it was their first time visiting Pulau Aman.

As for the choices of restaurants in Pulau Aman, most visitors are not sure about the reading 28.9 per cent, followed by agreeing 26.3 per cent, but some visitors strongly disagree 21.1 per cent. The pattern initiates further action due to distinguishing perceptions among visitors.

Table 3: Demographic profile

	Item	Mean	Mode	Median	Freq	%
Gender	1. Male	1.35	1	1	51	65.4
	2. Female				27	34.6
Ages	1. Below 20 years	2.7821	3	3	1	1.3
	2. 21-30				25	32.1
	3. 31-40				34	43.6
	4. 41-50				12	15.4
	5. 51 and above				6	7.7
Education	1. Secondary level	1.8974	2	2	23	29.5
	2. Cert. & Diploma				40	51.3
	3. Bachelor's Degree				15	19.2
	4. Msc & PhD.				0	0
Income	1. Below RM3000	3.3718	3	3	1	1.3
	2. RM 3001-4001				9	11.5
	3. RM 4001-5000				33	42.3
	4. RM 5001- 10000				30	38.5
	5. RM 10000 and above				5	6.4
Employment	1. Government	1.5769	2	2	33	42.3
	2. Private				45	57.7
Visitors origin	1. Local	1.2179	1	1	62	79.5
	2. Outsider				15	19.2
	3. International				1	1.3
Purpose visit	1. Family matters	2.7949	4	4	18	23.1
	2. Working				9	11.5
	3. Recreational activity				22	28.2
	4. Gastronomy activity				29	37.2
	5. Others				0	0
Type of Companion	1. Alone	2.7564	3	3	5	6.4
	2. Couple				16	20.5
	3. Below five persons				51	65.4
	4. 6-10 person				5	6.4
	5. More than ten persons				1	1.3

Source: Authors, 2021

Technically, there are only a few restaurants on the island, and there is no space for opening a new restaurant. The famous restaurant in Pulau Aman is “Restoran Terapung”, which serves delicious dishes and fresh seafood for the facilities on the Pulau Aman. Most of our respondents agree (39.5%) and strongly agree (34.2%) that the island has complete facilities. We can see “Dewan Serbaguna”, a clinic, shop, mosque, primary school, toilet, and so on that can be used by the occupant and people visiting Pulau Aman.

Table 4: Visitors' perspective at Pulau Aman

Item	SA	A	NS	D	SD	N(78)
Users and activity						
There are many recreational activities in Pulau Aman	23.7	50.0	15.8	7.9	2.6	100
The choices of restaurant	15.8	26.3	28.9	7.9	21.1	100
Complete facilities	34.2	39.5	18.4	7.9	0.0	100
Interesting activity	44.7	47.4	7.9	0.0	0.0	100
The signage on the island is helpful	42.1	39.5	15.8	2.6	0.0	100
The transportation within Pulau Aman is excellent and functional.	34.2	47.4	13.2	2.6	2.6	100
Social and physical						
The attitude of residents around the island is friendly	34.2	55.3	10.5	0.0	0.0	100
The existing design of the building is attractive	0.0	26.3	39.5	21.1	13.2	100
The building on the island is old and needs to be renovated.	34.2	52.6	13.2	0.0	0.0	100
Comfort and images						
The natural environment is clean and unpolluted	0.0	26.3	39.5	7.9	26.3	100
The scenery in Pulau Aman is great	34.2	44.7	13.2	7.9	0.0	100
The toilets that be provided are clean and comfortable	15.8	34.2	50.0	0.0	0.0	100
The Pulau Aman has excellent potential to be developed into a tourism area.	52.6	39.5	7.9	0.0	0.0	100

Note SA; Strongly Agree on A; Agree NS; Not Sure DA; Disagree SDA; Strongly Disagree

Source: Authors, 2021

The activities on the Pulau Aman are enjoyable. Most of our respondents strongly agreed (44.7%) and agreed (47.4%) with the statement because they loved fishing around this island due to the lot of fish that can be caught. Pulau Aman also served as a spot of feeling at the Pulau Aman to ensure the visitor that came to Pulau Aman could do some fishing activities. The signage on the Pulau Aman helps find the location. Most of our respondents agreed (39.5%) and strongly agreed (42.1%) that the signage on the island is helpful because most of the junction at Pulau Aman has signage for a visitor to find the location they want to go. Since the island is not huge, the signages are more helpful for visitors to see the attraction place. The transportation within Pulau Aman is excellent and functional. Our respondents agreed (47.4%) and strongly

agreed (34.2%) with the statement because, in Pulau Aman, they only use motorcycles and bicycles to move around, and there is no car being used since the island is small. 13.2% were unsure since it was their first time visiting Pulau Aman.

The attitude of residents around the island is friendly. Most respondents at, 55.3%, agreed, and 34.2% strongly agreed that the residents are friendly. Verbally the visitors are always welcome by the island residents and always smile at each other if they bump into each other on the walkways. It was an excellent attitude to pull more visitors to visit Pulau Aman. The existing design of the building is attractive. However, 39.5 per cent of the visitors need clarification about the statement because most of Pulau Aman's building is old-fashioned and needs to be renovated and some maintenance. As we can see, some of the building, like the chalet at Pulau Aman, needs to be renovated and maintained because it is a place for a tourist to rest. Three of them agreed due to the design of the building because they like old design buildings on the island. After all, they said it was Pulau Aman's identity. The island building is old and needs to be renovated. Most visitors agreed (55.3%) and strongly agreed (34.2%) with the statement and admitted the old building was the Pulau Aman's identity and only required maintenance and renovation. The rest are still determined.

The natural environment is clean and unpolluted. The visitors are unsure about the statement 39.5 per cent, followed by strongly disagree visitors 26.3 and agree on visitors 26.3 per cent. The result indicates further study on the matters that arise. The scenery in Pulau Aman is excellent. Most of our respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the total percentage of 78.9 about the statement because the views on the island are lovely and peaceful if we visit here to relax or release stress from our work or study. The toilets provided are clean and comfortable to use. 50% of the respondent not sure, and the rest vow to agree and strongly agree. The output needs to be further studied for future purposes. The bathrooms should be maintained because they are essential facilities the visitor uses. The Pulau Aman has excellent potential to develop into a tourism area. Most of our respondents total up to strongly agree and agree at 92.1 per cent with that statement because many visitors come to Pulau Aman weekly to do some fishing activities, sightseeing, cycle and eat "Mee Udang". So, Pulau Aman has excellent potential to be developed into a tourism area.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Pulau Aman is an island with tourist attractions from the Malaysian community and tourists from abroad. Due to this, the villagers must take serious about the facilities, cleanliness, safety and so on so that more tourists will come. The presence of exciting attractions there can indirectly provide benefits to the villagers. However, based on the issues regarding the island's safety, the villagers must take measures and urgent action to prevent the problem from persisting.

Good facilities are one reason tourists and visitors come to a place. Overall, agreeable index analysis indicates that visitors to Pulau Aman were satisfied with the situation there. This is because visitors who go to Pulau Aman are only for fishing and eating ‘Mee Udang’, yet there is more potential tourism product to be explored as a main attraction of Pulau Aman.

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