

## THE PROCESS AND IMPACT OF COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF CHERATING, PAHANG, MALAYSIA.

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### ABSTRACT

*Cherating is a coastal stretch several kilometres long facing the South China Sea. Situated along the eastern coast of Pahang, Malaysia, Cherating has developed into a popular tourist destination. Cherating is one of the numerous sandy beaches of Pahang that has seen tremendous development in recent years especially in the growth of accommodation facilities. The beach is the attraction and the main trunk road from Kuantan, Pahang state capital, makes it easily accessible to foreign and domestic tourists. The early development of Cherating was rather spontaneous with the opening of the Club Med Cherating Beach facilities particularly for foreign tourists. The beach where the Club Med is located is well hidden and secluded from the public view passing through the main road, an ideal location for a Club Med. The early success of Club Med in bringing holiday makers to Cherating beach has somehow prompted others to follow suit. In the meantime, the state government of Pahang adopted a liberal policy of allowing good positive development of coastal tourism in coastal areas like Cherating. So the initial spontaneous development has been taken over by a keenly planned and localized development. Many more beach resorts have been operational to cater for the demand of incoming tourists internationally as well as domestically. Sea food restaurants and other F & B joints have also been mushrooming. The business of tourism has become apparent to the casual observers passing through or stopping for food and lodging. The government has set up a turtle sanctuary and an information centre to facilitate tourists and visitors. This study will highlight the process and the impact of coastal tourism development in Cherating.*

**Key words:** *Tourism, development, process, impact, tourist, and attraction.*

### INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism covers a full range of activities related to tourism, recreation and leisure that take place in the coastal zones and the offshore waters. Water activities include yachting, surfing, swimming, water skiing, diving, snorkelling and fishing. Strolling, sunbathing, and playing ball games on sandy beaches are some activities preferred by land-bound tourists. Depending on the physical features of the coastal zones, some ecotourism activities like river cruise and turtle watching are also available. To support these activities, tourism industry players, both public and private, build hotels, resorts, chalets, restaurants and other infrastructures like retail business, fishing, diving and snorkelling stores, jetties, marinas and

boating harbours. Many beaches of the world are offering coastal tourism to domestic as well as foreign tourists. Beaches in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Hawaii, Australia, Fiji, Maldives, and Bali are world famous. Some beaches and offshore islands in Malaysia are also well known to international tourists. One of which is Cherating Beach in the east coast state of Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia. Coastal tourism is becoming a highly competitive business as nations actively seek to draw increased numbers of visitors to their shores. Malaysian government and tourism industry players are no exception. They have developed many tourism destinations of various types such as coastal, island, historical (heritage) and ecotourism. The aim of this paper is to analyse and evaluate the process and impact of coastal tourism development in Cherating.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A questionnaire survey and in-depth interview methods were used to gather primary data for the study. The first source of data is the tourists who were given the questionnaires to respond. The questionnaires were placed in several places of accommodation and stations where tourists go for activities like river cruise and turtle watching. Questionnaires could be self-administered by respondents. A total of 66 completed questionnaires were collected for analysis during May and June 2010. Other sources of information include hotel managers, restaurant owners or operators and the locals who have an interest in, or who have been affected by tourism in the area. Hotel managers were given structured questionnaires to answer or provide the information required. The restaurant owners and operators were asked when they first started operations and how many workers they hired. The locals involved in providing direct services to tourists were interviewed in details about their services. The former village chief was also interviewed for information about Cherating. All these information and data are used throughout this paper wherever relevant and proper.

### **Cherating Beach and the Village**

Cherating is a popular beach resort area in Pahang. It is located about 30 km north of Kuantan, the state capital of Pahang. It is a typical small fishing village on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The bay-like beach is beautiful, nice and wide, extremely laid-back and hidden from view from the main trunk road to Terengganu. The famous Club Mediterranee, commonly known as Club Med, built its first resort in Asia in one of the secluded locations on Cherating Beach because of its immaculate and breathtaking beauty. There are not many beach enclaves so well protected by an outcrop of hill rock on the open east coast of Peninsular Malaysia as Cherating. The inshore water in the bay area is relatively calm with small waves except during the monsoon season when international surfing competition is held annually. In fact, the beach has long been described as “surfers’ haven”. This is the beach the backpackers found in 1970s to frequently spend time and spread the news. The Cherating area is drained by a small river about 4 km long known as Cherating river overgrown by mangroves where fireflies, snakes, lizards and monkeys are found. This habitat provides a natural environment for tourists to engage in ecotourism activities when they go on a river cruise. A few spots on the beach adjacent to Cherating are turtle nesting areas frequented by tourists to watch turtles laying eggs usually in the middle of the night.

Cherating is a village or *kampung* in Mukim Sungai Karang in the District of Kuantan. The actual or the original Cherating village now called *Cherating Lama* or old Cherating is tucked in between the trunk road and the Cherating bay or the sea. The old or the original Cherating is also known as the *Kampung Budaya Cherating* or Cherating Cultural Village. Cherating Village has over the years expanded to include four others known as Baging, Kampung Baru (new) Cherating, Bukit Palas or Padang Lalang and Pengkalan Bata. The last two are located inland and do not enjoy beach front. Some coastal population have migrated inland for better living. The whole of Cherating has about 3,000 people mostly new people working in hotels, chalets, resorts, shops, and restaurants. There are also people of Cherating still working as fishermen. Cherating is originally a fishing village opened in about 1870 by a Kelantanese named Abdul Latif Awang. While living in Cherating, Awang had five children from whom the original population expanded and began to open up new land in and around the village. It is recorded in history that his youngest child named Mek binti Abdul Latif died in 1999 at the age of 120 years old. One of her grandchildren is still living owning and operating chalets in Cherating *Lama*.

### **Tourism Development in Cherating Area**

Tourism development in coastal regions, on both mainland and island, depends on diverse range of overlaying resource characteristics associated with biophysical environment like climatic conditions, topographic features, ecosystems and habitats (Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002). In Cherating, for example, the natural environment of the marine and coastal zone, known collectively as the beach, is the main attraction for tourists. First popularized by backpackers, many local and international tourists now visit Cherating regularly to enjoy the sun, sea and beach. It is proposed that tourism development in Cherating will be looked at several aspects such as tourist arrivals, growth of tourism activities and support services, and the continuous promotion of Cherating as tourist destination in the various media especially print and electronic.

First of all, Cherating has the characteristic features of a beach destination to attract tourists. The official e-Tourism Website Portal for the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia has declared that Cherating is a famous beach town not only famous to Malaysians, but also to surfers and beach bums alike worldwide. The Cherating beach is described as a hidden enclave, immaculate and breath taking. Because of this, thousands of tourists come to Cherating every year. Table 1 shows some figures given by various hotels surveyed.

**Table 1: Number of Hotel Guests in the Last Five Years (2005 - 2009)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Hotel A</b>	<b>Hotel B</b>	<b>Hotel C</b>	<b>Hotel D</b>
2005	23,092	81,373	4,930	
2006	21,183	43,974	6,736	
2007	20,695	44,659	8,408	29,540
2008	19,918	43,088	8,586	18,298
2009	18,936	39,654	10,090	24,700

Only four out of six major hotels participated in the survey. The hotels were asked to provide the data for the last five years to indicate some kind of growth in the tourist

arrivals. Only Hotel C recorded steady growth; the others are showing declining figures. Nonetheless, except for Hotel B, the decline in the number of hotel guests in Cherating during the last five years has been rather slight. The hotels and the many chalets and resorts not surveyed may have recorded growth in the number of their guests. Whatever the reasons for the slight decline, coastal tourism in Cherating has been active since it started in the early 1970s.

Some 30 to 40 years ago, backpackers discovered the beauty of Cherating beach and stayed as guests in kampung houses belonging to the local population. More of these backpackers and budget travelers came to Cherating. The need for proper and better accommodation became apparent when Duyong Motel started in 1973 followed later by more new beach chalets and guest houses in the old original Cherating. There are now about 15 chalets offering budget room rates in the beach area and they are very popular among tourists from Europe, North America and Australia. When Cherating became more well known to tourists from Singapore and also domestic tourists, more new and expensive hotels were built in 1980s and 1990s to cater for them. These hotels found their beach locations away from the old Cherating village. These new hotels recorded a much higher percentage of Malaysian domestic tourists as their guests. There has been a steady growth of domestic tourism in the Cherating area since the middle of 1980s. Presently, Cherating is much more accessible to Malaysians from the west coast with the new East Coast Expressway linking Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan, the state capital of Pahang. It is a 3 hour pleasure and leisure drive from Kuala Lumpur.

International tourists to Cherating come from many countries of the world. Many are Europeans like German, French, Austrian, Belgian, British and Swiss. There are also Canadians and Australians. Most of them are young, single male and female. Quite a number travel with a friend, mostly female. Middle age married couples are also encountered in the survey. Many are university graduates working as professionals and earning more than RM5000 a month. While most come for the first time, a few have been to Cherating more than once. Almost all are on vacation enjoying the beach, the sea and the local food, culture and people in Cherating. The length of their stay in Cherating varies from two to five and more days. Most come to Cherating by bus from many other tourist destinations in Malaysia such as the National Park, Tioman and Perhentian Island (both are off-shore islands in the east coast). Most are satisfied with the services rendered to them during their stay, even though many do not intend to return because they want to see other places in the world. They would certainly recommend Cherating to their relatives and friends, although most of them knew about the place from Travel Book or Guide such as the Lonely Planet. Some comments from them on what improvement Cherating needs to make their stay better in future are positive like 'Keep it like this', 'Nothing. It's a small village with not a lot of tourists for quiet holidays', 'Nothing. All is perfect'. One French tourist says 'I will tell you that in 4 days'. He might have a lot of things to say about Cherating; good or bad is any body's guess. The negative comments will be used to highlight the impact of tourism development later in the paper.

The profile of domestic tourists in Cherating is based on the analysis of the 40 odd respondents who returned the questionnaires. About as many come from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (the most developed Central Region of the country) as from the less developed east coast states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. Other states like Negeri Sembilan, Johore and Sarawak are also represented in the samples. This shows that Cherating is known throughout the country. There are slightly more males than females, more married than

single persons and mostly are younger than 45 years old. The majority are graduates working as professionals and executives with monthly income of more than RM3,000. Many travelled with family members, while some came to Cherating with friends, business associates and company staff. A large majority came to Cherating for holiday especially with family members, while some came on business and a few on social visits. Many domestic tourists in Cherating are repeat visitors even though the number of first timers is also substantial. This shows that Cherating is becoming a very popular destination for domestic tourists. Almost everyone in the sample cited the beach and the sea as the main attraction. A few claimed they came to Cherating because they liked local food, culture and people. Knowledge about Cherating came predominantly from friends although a few relied on the internet, travel agencies and the mass media. Almost everybody drove to Cherating, and very few came by bus unlike the foreign tourists who relied heavily on public transport. Domestic tourists must have liked Cherating a lot because many wished for improvement to the place in various aspects. Their comments will appear next in the activities section of this paper.

What do tourists do in Cherating? The obvious answer would probably be those activities related to the beach and off-shore waters like surfing, snorkeling, fishing, skiing, sailing, and sunbathing. To know what tourists exactly do in Cherating, a survey on one or two tourism operators was necessary. The first one is *Pak Su*, a licenced nature guide, who takes tourists to watch fireflies along the river and turtles laying eggs on the beach. These activities are done at night. Usually *Pak Su* (his real name is Ariffin) will take the same tourists to watch fireflies along the river first and then watch turtles on the beach nearby. The encounter with fireflies and turtles usually takes one whole evening. Fireflies are available at Cherating River and Yak Yak River at Ibok in adjacent district of Kemaman, Terengganu. Turtles normally land at Telok Mak Nik also in Kemaman district, a short drive from Cherating. Foreign tourists like *Pak Su* because he can humorously explain the fireflies and turtle watching trips in English. There is another tourism operator who is more enterprising than his mentor *Pak Su*. He is Hafiz, an Indian Muslim from Mynmar, married to a local woman, operates Cherating Net Enterprise based in the old Cherating village. His Cherating Activities include Cherating Mangrove River Cruise (day), Fireflies Watching Trip along Cherating River (night), Snorkeling Trip to nearby Snake Island (sea and day), Sea Fishing Trips, Kayaking and River Fishing (can be at night) in Cherating River. Hafiz's favourite subject is fireflies and he explains the flies to tourists like an expert. He keeps record of who come for his services in a simple register and declares a figure of about 5,000 tourists a year go on his trips. A simple count from his register produces the following figures given in Table 2. In the first five months of 2010 a total of 1,746 tourists have already registered for Cherating Activities. Most of the activities involve Cherating River instead of the famous Cherating beach.

**Table 2: Number of Tourists Doing Cherating Activities, 2010.**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Malaysians</b>	<b>Foreigners</b>	<b>Total</b>
January	139	60	199
February	323	103	426
March	196	117	313
April	177	112	289
May	355	164	519
<b>Total</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>1746</b>

Apparently the beach and the waters off-shore have been underutilized by tourists. Applications to encourage beach and sea activities like skiing, sailing, swimming, canoeing and the like have not been approved by the local authorities. They might have considered such activities as risky and dangerous and would need close supervision. According to ex-village headman accidents like drowning have occurred.

Some tourists have voiced their opinion that authorities or private operators put up some benches, chairs and tables on the beach for tourists to relax and enjoy fresh air. Other said that more facilities for competition during the monsoon months held for the last three years need promotion and publicity like the Monsoon Cup in Duyong, Kuala Terengganu so that more tourists know about it and flock to Cherating.

Besides trips and other outdoor activities for young energetic tourists, there is also the need to show cultural performances in the Cherating area. Some tourists, domestic as well as foreign, expect to experience traditional dances and songs in the evening at suitable locations such as the well-built complex by the Cherating River known as Cherating Cultural Complex. Cultural shows should be part of the tourism package so that tourist's two to three days stay in Cherating is packed with day and evening or night activities. Cultural Bureau of the Village Committee on Development and Security should look into this matter and make Cherating known not only because of the beach and its natural environment but also by the people and their traditional dances, songs, music, food and games. Cultural package may occupy some tourists in the evening. With culture package tourists may stay longer and spend more in Cherating. This will help tourism to flourish by making it less dependent on seasons. Some analysts said that tourism in this area is very seasonal. The occupancy rates of hotels is available from month to month to show the seasonality of tourism.

**Table 3: Hotel Occupancy Rates by Months**

Months	Hotel A	Hotel B	Hotel C	Hotel D
March	M	m	m	M
April	m	m	m	M
May	M	h	h	H
June	h	h	h	h
July	h	h	h	m
August	m	h	h	m
September	m	h	m	l
October	M	l	l	m
November	m	l	l	m
December	m	l	m	h
January	l	l	l	l
February	m	l	l	m

It seems that in Cherating, tourism peaks in the months of May through August, averages between medium and low during the months of September through December, and dips low in the month of January. The east coast of Peninsular Malaysia suffers from the

monsoon season (heavy rain and strong winds) during which very few tourists come to the east coast and Cherating in particular.

### **The Impacts of Tourism Development**

The Malaysian government encourages tourism development in every state because it is an important mechanism for economic development and the creation of employment opportunities (Azizan Marzuki, 2009). The benefits of tourism development are as numerous as the costs. A brief survey on tourism development in the coastal area of Cherating reveals clear positive and negative impacts to the people and the environment of the area. The positive impacts or the benefits are business and employment opportunities while the negative impacts or the costs are higher cost of living, social tension, and environmental pollution.

Cherating is a small place, and to house a number of large and expensive hotels and also restaurants to cater for thousands of tourists, the impact on the local economy must be tremendous if the hotels and restaurants get their daily supplies of fish, meat and vegetables from the local fishermen and farmers. This aspect was not looked into in this research. The focus was on the growth of hotel and restaurant business and the subsequent result of greater employment opportunities for the local population. Table 4 shows some of the benefits from the growth of hotel industry.

**Table 4: Employment Data in Hotel Industry in Cherating**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Hotel A</b>	<b>Hotel B</b>	<b>Hotel C</b>	<b>Hotel D</b>
Year of Operation	1987	1993	2003	1994
No of Staff then	30	200	56	92
No of Staff now (2010)	85	150	86	72
Percent from Pahang	76.5	80	56	65
Percent from outside Pahang	23.5	20	44	35

(Source: Survey Data, 2010)

Besides employment, growth of tourism industry encourages people to undertake a variety of business notably those with capital, entrepreneurship skills and experience. Souvenir shops, mini market, and coffee shops are popular outlets in Cherating to cater for the needs of tourists. However, one outlet that stands out among the rest is Cherating Travel post that describes itself as 'One Stop Travel Shop'. This Travel post is especially popular among foreign tourists who need all kinds of services from cyber to express bus tickets. They can also borrow or exchange story books. Travel post can also arrange or organize all kinds of trips such as snorkeling trip, mangrove river trip, turtle watching trip, fireflies trip, sea and river fishing trip and so on. The owner of this shop migrated from Dungun, Terengganu to Cherating in 1985 to work in a mini motel, and then started this service in 2000. He along with many others like *Pak Su*, Hafiz from Myanmar, shops, chalet and restaurant owners/operators are not only earning but also extend their business to or employ others. It seems that the whole economy in Cherating depends on tourism. Many people in Cherating work in tourism related services. Cherating has no choice but to sustain its tourism industry by promoting further and making sure that the industry is sustainable.

Sustainability is an important question for Cherating tourism because it is an old established coastal destination. Industry players and tourists alike may not be mindful of the pressure on coastal resources they exert so much so that certain places have become rundown and need maintenance and repair or the beaches have become garbage bins. The study has solicited opinion from tourists on what is needed to improve the conditions in Cherating so that their next visit would be a better one. Some have favourable comments which have been recorded above, while others have negative views that will be highlighted here. A number of tourists commented that they wanted to see cleaner beaches. The local authorities must ensure that the beach is clean and the village free from mosquitoes and stray animals. There must be garbage collection and disposal in a proper and approved way. The authority seems to treat Cherating as an ordinary village forgetting that it has become a global tourism destination. On the subject of cleanliness, tourists also commented that they wanted to see more cleaner and comfortable eateries especially in the old Cherating and along the main road leading to it. Besides, the security of the place is also important because there so many visitors and yet only a few police personnel is stationed in Cherating. These issues might have dissuaded some visitors and that is disservice to the future of tourism.

## CONCLUSION

Cherating developed from a small fishing village to a global tourism destination. One attraction is the beach coupled with other physical and socio-cultural features have made it known throughout the world. Discovered by backpackers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the village became famous and soon there was the growth of accommodation and restaurants to cater for not just the budget tourists but also the well to do holiday makers from Malaysia and across the globe. Cherating is liked by both the budget travellers as well as the affordable tourists. There are, however, signs of the destination being neglected by the authorities as well as the industry players.

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