
Transportation as a Driver for Sustainable Tourism in Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of transportation sector in Terengganu, Malaysia. The study employed a qualitative approach in which interviews and document analysis were used. The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings show that the majority of informants are satisfied with the transportation sector around the main focus areas at Kuala Terengganu, but suggest increased public transport in interesting places located far from the city. However, the analysis shows that the main weaknesses that need to be addressed are the telecommunications systems in the tourist areas. The lack of internet access limits alternatives in choosing affordable transportation for tourists. The findings of this study contribute significantly to the enrichment of the literature in tourism and transportation. It also has positive implications for helping tourism operators such as government and private agencies involved to strengthen the tourism sector in Terengganu.

Keywords: *Culture; e-hailing; telecommunications; tourism; transportation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is one of the sectors that contribute significantly to the global economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2016) reports that for over the five years growth of 2.8 percent in the tourism sector surpassed the global economy by 2.3 percent and several other key sectors such as manufacturing and retail. Apart from this, the transport sector is also a major driver of the tourism sector's growth (Mammadov, 2013; Khan, Siddique, Zaman & Yousaf, 2017). Similar to any other country, the transportation sector in Malaysia also has a positive impact on the tourism sector across the country. In 2017, Malaysia was ranked 12th as the most visited by tourists from around the world (Utusan Malaysia, 2017). In line with this trend, the government has declared 2020 a Year of Visit Malaysia. This study focuses on tourism in Terengganu based on the factors of that the state is rich with culture, popular with beautiful beaches and islands which are a tourist attraction as well as a variety of traditional food options. Back in 2017, Terengganu was selected as the preferred

destination with the Terengganu Visit Year 2017. The government is aiming for 6.5 million tourists to visit Terengganu by the year 2020. The growth of the tourism industry in Terengganu requires the provision of good and efficient facilities and infrastructure to generate the economy to the maximum potential. A variety of tourism facilities have been provided such as accommodation, transportation, and information on attractive tourist destinations.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as an individual adventure and living in a place other than their usual residence for a temporary period for leisure, business, and other purposes. Transportation is the heart of the tourism sector that connects homes, destinations, amenities, and points of interest throughout the traveling period. Barros (2010) explains that tourism and transportation are naturally intertwined. This is because travelers start their journey from home to a destination using transportation. So, the choice of transportation determines overall tourism satisfaction. Indeed, tourism is influenced by the growth of the transport sector.

The growth of the tourism industry in Terengganu requires the provision of transportation. It certainly has a significant influence on the growth in the tourism industry as Smith, Robins and Dickinson (2018) mentioned about a refined policy approach has been adopted to recognize the level of transportation services in rural destinations with the plan to move to “more sustainable” modes of transport. However, in Terengganu, it is seen as less efficient in facilitating the ease of movement for tourists to go from place to place. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the near-distance transportation system that takes and sends tourists from their accommodation to destinations within the city, points of interest around tourist’s stay, and airports-to-piers service. The transport facilities which are always operational, easy-to-get, convenient and efficient are one of the reasons for attracting tourists to visit. Also, this transportation system allows tourists to be introduced to interesting places around their stay which can generate income for the surrounding community.

The lack of transportation operating in a schedule, as well as the facilities to get transportation, hinders the movement of tourists, and this is detrimental to the tourism sector due to the purchasing power of tourists is not capitalized to the fullest extent. Besides, construction activities such as for shopping malls in Terengganu are expected to attract tourists and this will require efficient transport in moving tourists from their stay to the malls or the surrounding area. Taxi services in Terengganu are still concentrated in airports and bus stations to pick up and send passengers to their accommodation. Limited taxi services make it difficult for tourists to travel. For example, travelers who have arrived at the hotel and want to eat outside of the hotel or to explore the area are to contact the taxi on their own since most hotels in Terengganu do not provide taxi services and do not provide send off and pick up transportation for travelers to go places around the inn. Tourists who come to Terengganu for work-related events such as meetings, conferences, and other matters require quick and easy transportation to visit places of interest near places of stay. Also, the provision of bus transportation, such as *casligas*, is not widely available in interesting places around Terengganu as the service operates only in the urban zone.

There are numerous researches conducted about the transport sector and the increase in the tourism sector. Transportation facilities and their alternatives have proven to be an important factor in tourism development, however, it is not fully implemented by tourism sector operators. More and more studies on these two fields have been explored and gained attention (Bieger and Wittmer, 2006).

In a separate study, previous researchers noted that transportation was influenced by tourism activities because some tourists travel for leisure (Bieger and Wittmer, 2006). The importance of transport in tourism has been recognized by various researchers (Gilbert, 1939; Robinson, 1976; Hall, 1991; Inskip, 1991; Gunn, 1994; Page, 1994, 1997), but it was not studied in detail. The relationship between transportation and tourism is generally viewed from the perspective of accessibility and based on geographical factors without explaining the factors (Prideaux, 2000; Khadaroo and Seetanah, 2008). Previous studies on the relevance of these two sectors have not been elaborated in detail. Lundgren (1982) studied only the role of transport between pedestrians to suburban destinations and Pearce (1987) analyzed the transport used by tourists between cities to surrounding destinations. The study aims to look at the needs of the transport services needed by tourists, the contribution of the tourism sector to the growth of the tourism industry, and the challenges of developing transport efficiency to assist economic growth in the tourism sector. This study aims to answer two questions, what kind of transport services do tourists need and how can the transportation sector contribute to the growth of the tourism sector?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Terengganu is located on the East Coast of peninsular Malaysia. The population is 1.152 million people and 94.8% are Bumiputera. Terengganu is divided into eight districts namely Kuala Terengganu, Marang, Kuala Nerus, Setiu, Besut, Hulu Terengganu, Dungun, and Kemaman. The city center is located in the district of Kuala Terengganu.

Terengganu's current economic strength is in the construction sector followed by government, business, hotel, and restaurant services, manufacturing, finance and insurance, transportation and communications, wholesale and retail trade, as well as agriculture, fisheries, and agriculture. The state government's 2017 budget presentation states that the tourism industry is the second most important industry after the oil and gas industry contributes to the State's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) significantly. Plus, it is the catalyst for the growth of various chain activities such as businesses, enterprises, and tourism-related services.

The state government's commitment to developing the tourism sector can be seen in its efforts to promote the year to visit Terengganu and an allocation of \$ 80 million for the sector. Among the efforts were to open a Tourist Information Kiosk in each District, create Landmarks with historical or uniqueness for Tourism in each district, and establish Tourism Industry Skills Training programs such as tour guides for the youth. Terengganu creates four clusters of products and destinations to standardize the tourism industry, namely the first cluster of beaches: island, lake second cluster: Kenyir, the third cluster of Kuala Terengganu

Waterfront City heritage, and the fourth cluster of other products including arts and culture, heritage history.

Some issues have been raised in the study of Rosniza Aznie et al. (2012) titled “Besut beach resort, Terengganu as a tourist destination”. According to the study, tourists face difficulties in terms of accessibility and reach to resort areas in the Besut district. The variety of public transport facilities that are readily available are one of the factors in ensuring that the area continues to receive tourists. Besides, the transportation sector is said to be economically viable but its impact was not impactful. The transportation sector can be enhanced by expanding it in the tourism sector.

The transportation sector should not be overlooked because it is a big factor in the tourism sector. If the hotel and accommodation facilities around Terengganu are easily accessible and have many options on the internet and mobile phones such as Trivago, Traveloka, Agoda, Booking.com, and other hotel booking applications, then the transport sector can also be empowered through online applications. Transportation in Terengganu also needs to be expanded and should not be limited to taxi and bus services. Among them is the GrabCar service and the latest Maxim which starts operating in 2018 in Kuantan and extends its wings to Terengganu in 2019 (Maxim Website, 2019). Also, continuous promotion and publicity of transportation facilities and services should be undertaken. To do this, the government and the private sector, especially the hotel companies, have to work together to implement the various transportation services in the tourism sector in Terengganu. In this regard, the study aims to examine the development of the transportation and tourism sector in Terengganu in generating the economy.

In boosting the state's tourism sector, the state government has also provided assistance such as for the taxi services by providing assistance incentives. Moreover, transport such as trishaws and transport boats are provided incentives to decorate to introduce the culture and heritage of the local community. The latest transportation in the pipeline is the Development of the East Coast Rail Network (ECRL) Project which connects the Klang Valley with the East Coast through a rail service network. The government's commitment to providing a variety of transportation facilities shows its commitment to developing infrastructure for the well-being of the people which directly contributes to the national economy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in the form of document research and fieldwork in achieving the set objectives. The study of the documents in this research involves a literature review and recent research in the field of tourism, economics, and culture in theory. Furthermore, a basic understanding of the literature sources enables the construction of a conceptual framework that incorporates elements of Terengganu tourism, transportation, and culture and its implications for the socio-economic status of Terengganu. This study used a purposive sampling technique aimed at the selection of respondents as it is a non-probability sampling technique that carries out the purpose of the selected sample based on the assessment and criteria set by the researcher. Among the criteria for selecting samples as having experience in a trip at Terengganu and used a public service in Terengganu. Also, interviews with 20

informants were conducted to achieve the objectives of the study. The identity of the informant is kept confidential and named using codes for analysis purposes. The informants are labeled with codes V001 through V020. Interview data were then analyzed using content analysis. The results of this analysis have been shaped into themes for the discussion of the findings. This study is conducted in a descriptive form because a good descriptive form is necessary for a study to understand transportation problems in the tourism sector in the state of Terengganu.

Provision of Public Transports according to Consumer Needs

The discussion started by identifying the types of public transport that tourists often use when visiting Terengganu. All informants stated that they use e-hailing services such as GrabCar, Maxim, and MyCar to move from one destination to another. The main factor of this service being a tourist choice is that it is convenient and available at all times.

However, the majority of informants suggested that more urban bus services are provided as well as more frequent operating hours. Bus services are considered a good alternative to tourists because of the lower fares. Additionally, the GrabCar service is easy to use, but the charges are relatively high. This situation has led travelers to suggest alternatives between buses to the city to facilitate movement. On top of that, many tourism destinations have improved their public transportations and bus services as they aim to provide a better attraction and service (Bie, Xiong, Yan & Qu, 2019).

The bus service or operating hours are also a factor that many tourists emphasize as the frequency of availability in existing bus services is less than satisfactory. Tourists have to wait for hours to get to a place due to the low frequency of bus movements. According to V009 (2020), public transport such as buses is important because not everyone knows how to use or have an e-hailing service application. This is because tourists' demographic backgrounds are so diverse that they use transportation services according to their convenience and affordability. Also, travelers can save a little because bus fares are cheaper than a taxi and e-hailing services.

Based on the interview data, most travelers recommend providing more inter-city bus services as fares are cheaper than Grab Car.

"I just think it would be great if the state of Terengganu provided buses focused on tourist destinations. It will be easier and convenient to move and visit interesting places in Terengganu. For example, if you go to Lake Kenyir, it would be difficult to get there except to drive or rent a car. It would have been nice if the public transport service like I said was made to go there".

(V001, 2019)

The informant emphasized the development of transportation in Terengganu as an area that needed to be improved. According to V005 (2020), the location of interesting places in Terengganu is far from one place to another. He detailed his experience while visiting Terengganu the previous year.

"This is my experience when I came to Terengganu before this, for example, my hotel stay around Terengganu city but if I wanted to go to the Crystal Mosque it would be a long way

away and would require me to book transportation like Grab. Terengganu is not like Melaka, where all the interesting places are all close by. So, to me, that is a challenge. That doesn't yet include if I want to go to the Kuala Besut pier to get to the island destination. Before Grab was not available in Terengganu, I used a taxi and he had a very expensive charge compared to Grab's newly introduced charge in Terengganu. But what to do, that's the only option. "

This was also acknowledged by all informants who said it was a challenge that tourists face when visiting Terengganu. V005, V006, V014, and V019 (2020) recommend the presence of shuttle buses to facilitate travelers to the jetty. On the other hand, the airport to the pier heading to the island resort was far away and stifles tourist interest. As tourists, they want a good vacation experience. However, they have to choose and plan the time and duration of the trip as it is difficult to get to all the interesting destinations during one holiday.

"In my opinion, Terengganu lacks the kind of transport that can bring tourists in groups."

(V006, 2019)

"The transportation facilities in Terengganu are not satisfactory. The inter-city buses are also not operating well and are only focused on the city center. The operating hours are also inconsistent. E-hailing in Terengganu is relatively new and efficient, but it can sometimes be too expensive."

(V013, 2020)

Based on the feedback received, most tourists want efficient transportation services to make it easier for them to visit places of interest in Terengganu. The tourists' concern on moving from one place to another by using efficient public transport is due to their high dependency towards the public transport thus this kind of service needs to be reworked to make it widely available to tourists. In addition to increasing this kind of service, it is also essential to ensure the safety and comfort of tourists. According to Barros (2010), efficiency, comfort, and safety are factors that determine the quality and experience of individual tourism. In most cases, transportation is an important factor for a tourist and this shows that there is a significant relationship between the efficiency of the transport sector and the growth of the tourism industry. This was also noted in previous studies in tourism. It explains the relationship between transport and tourism is seen based on accessibility factors as transportation is a key link for a tourist. The selection is based on factors of tourist preference such as speed, load, comfort, cost, and safety (Hashim and Ismail, 2017).

In line with the development of the current economic landscape and telecommunication, the transportation sector has also taken advantage of this technology by creating e-transport applications. In addition to GrabCar, the Maxim application was also established inside Terengganu. The majority of informants say that since Maxim operates, they are more likely to use Maxim because of the lower price offered. The increase in the number of e-hailing services is a good development as the increase in supply will lead to lower prices which will surely satisfy tourists. However, informants said the frequency and number of grab cars and

maxims operating should be increased, especially during the holidays. The service providers should be more aware of this situation so as not to cause more complaints among tourists.

“In my opinion, with the availability of taxi and e-hailing services such as Mycar and the like, I can move to places I need to reach easily and fares are affordable. However, if the quality of public transport systems such as buses can be improved, it will make it easier for individuals who do not have e-hailing applications or are unable to pay for e-hailing service fares due to a tight budget for example, for students. ”

(V019, 2020)

The majority of informants recommend the creation of flexible and user-friendly public transport infrastructure and facilities, especially for tourists who do not have a vehicle. Also, the diversity of tourist backgrounds needs to be taken into account as public transport users are often composed of young men and women (Le-Klahn et al., 2014; Farag & Lyons, 2012; Quiroga, 1990). V015 (2020) stated that the state government needs to consider the best alternative in developing public transport systems in Terengganu as there are many interesting places to visit by tourists. In addition to bus services, informants also suggest *Tuk tuk*-like services in Thailand for nearby tourist locations. *Tuk-tuk* is one of the most popular and well-known styles of tricycles in Thailand. Also, informants suggested that the government provide bicycle services to facilitate short-distance movements especially in the city of Kuala Terengganu. Alternatives like these should be made to provide comfort and enjoyment for tourists as they can engage in activities with family and friends.

Le-Klähn, Roosen, Gerike & Hall (2015) stated that tourists rely on using public transport when they visit the destinations that are located or nearby areas. This factor should be considered in providing transportation options for the tourists. Considering that changes to existing tourism transport services will surely have an impact on demand and also knowing that new tourists' needs mean different services to be offered by the suppliers. Hence, the approach must be able to measure and analyze these mutual influences on each other.

The establishment of efficient and various types of public transportations for the tourists will provide more flexibility for the tourists to move from one place to another. Besides, this factor will also encourage the tourists to enjoy and revisit the place, which can help to boost the tourism industry and the economy of the destinations. When the reach to go to one place is high, more tourists will visit the country especially travelers on a budget. This is because they do not have to spend a lot of money to rent any form of transportation. Adding more budget-friendly transportation options will also increase the number of tourists visiting the state, as it is in line with the concept of supply and demand (Palhares, 2003). The options allow the tourists to be able to choose the means of transportation that is suitable with their preferences, convenience, and budget.

Improvement of Public Transport Service

The transportation sector in Terengganu can be upgraded by taking into account various factors such as demographic factors of the citizens for a more comprehensive idea (V002, 2020). Among the efforts that can be made are to maximize promotions through social media

such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other online applications. E-hailing applications can also include tourism promotions to show the relationship between these two important sectors. However, the majority of informants are not aware of the promotion of tourism through online transport applications.

“I do not know about the promotion of this tourism through e-Transportation because I have never seen it anywhere. The promotion method through e-transport applications needs to be increased as more and more tourists have access to the app.”

(V016, 2020)

This promotion method also needs to be targeted to the right target audience to ensure its effectiveness. The e-transport application of technology is very effective because operators can place instructions and information in applications in many languages and it can be targeted to all travelers around the world.

Based on the interviews, the informants as a whole welcomed the government's wishes on the construction of ECRL. In addition to saving money, ECRL also saves them time and energy. The project is capable of increasing the number of tourists and promoting the states of the East Coast as the mode of transport is not only subject to bus and airplane service, but also the railway system. Tourists who want to get to their preferred tourist destination in the East Coast area can benefit because the railway project has more stops than boarding an aeroplane. With the existence of the quality of the transport sector, the number of tourists will increase. This is because as the quality of the public transport system improves, more tourists will come because they can travel to preferred destinations using the public transport services provided in Terengganu.

The state of Terengganu is an exciting destination to visit because of its unique cultural features and unique history. The beauty of the tranquil island resort and beaches adds to the increase in tourist attractiveness of Terengganu. The strengthening of the transportation sector to encourage the growth of tourism activities should be capitalized. However, there are some challenges in developing this sector (Smith, Robins & Dickinson, 2018), and it depends on the influence of the state government and agencies involved. Among the informants mentioned are the demographic factors of the population. Population density and economic characteristics also need to be taken into account to avoid loss. This issue also needs the attention of the government to ensure the viability of both sectors.

“To me, people who come to Terengganu, do not come here all the time. People come only on holidays or during the holiday season. So the government should also see if it wants to build more transportation facilities, it needs to be suitable to the demands. ”

(V0010, 2020)

V003, V007, and V008 (2019) added:

“For example, if people want to come to the island, they have a certain month to go there. Because if I’m not mistaken starting from the 10th month (October) to the third month of the

year the island does not open. Because it's monsoon season. I once asked this grab driver, they will use many apps besides grab to find customers. Because when there is no tourist they depend on the customer of the student but when the student vacation semester their income is becoming uncertain. They told me that when a customer wants to go to a jetty at Besut, it was a blessing for them because have such a high commission to send them there. So, that could be a challenge."

Although there are e-hailing applications such as Grab car and Maxim, access is still limited due to its dependency on internet access. When visiting some of the most interesting places in Terengganu, the main problem is a lack of access to the internet. This makes it difficult to book a grab car or maxim and travelers have to take a taxi and pay for it for a high price. Thus, the improvement of the telecommunications sector is seen as critical if Terengganu aims to maximize the tourism sector's economy. Collaboration with public and private telecommunications companies is a prerequisite for ensuring the state's tourism sector is booming. The telecommunication factor cannot be overlooked as it is a tourist necessity today.

Moreover, the improvement in terms of maintenance of the transport sector was also emphasized by informants. This is because their experience of visiting Terengganu found that the level of maintenance was not satisfactory in terms of service and cleanliness. In this regard, public transport service operators can take countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore for example (V007, V014 & V019 (2020)). The implementation needs to be holistic for the experience to be satisfactory for tourists. Furthermore, the efficiency of public services regarding punctuality can also be improved, providing a platform for consumer complaints and a platform for announcements in the event of interruption and other appropriate services.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF TOURISM SECTOR IN TERENGGANU

Besides discussing how the transport sector can add value to tourism activities in Terengganu, informants also mostly emphasize other aspects. These include upgrading the infrastructure, updating and revitalizing interesting locations that are intended for tourist attractions such as the Islamic Civilization Park. The majority of the informants interviewed expressed frustration over the infrastructure in the area besides stating it was not interactive. Efforts should be made so that these visitors can become agents of dispersal to attract more tourists to Terengganu. The influence of word of mouth is important in promoting tourism products (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; Confente, 2015; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2018; Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014). The efforts of the state government to appoint the *Persatuan Anak-Anak Terengganu Di Perantauan* (PERANTAU) as a tourism ambassador to promote Terengganu nationwide is a wise accomplishment. The implementation was announced by the state Tourism, Culture, and Information Technology Committee Chairman, Ustaz Ariffin Deraman.

Another effort that can be made to further the tourism sector in Terengganu is to highlight its uniqueness from the perspective of its identity. The promotion of Terengganu identity can be

done in a variety of ways using a variety of sources. One of these is to empower its Muslim-friendly hotels as the symbol of the Terengganu image. The identity and image of Terengganu should be in line with the services offered. The choice of a good and Muslim-friendly hotel guarantees safety and comfort to consumers. There are many studies on HMM and its influence on the growth of the tourism industry (Mohsin, Ramli, & Alkhulayfi, 2016; Chandra, 2014; Wingett & Turnbull, 2017; Battour, 2018). However, the services offered should be concurrent, even more, special than conventional hotels (Siti Zanariah, 2020). The maximum amount of promotion is required to make it one of the landmarks of tourism in Terengganu. For example, Paya Bunga Hotel needs to be more visible to tourists by highlighting its signboards and promotions as HMM. Other hotels such as Primula Beach Resort, Tabung Haji Hotel, and Duyong Marina & Resort need to make an effort to attract tourists. Every aspect including management must adhere to Islamic principles and have complete guidelines. Strong cooperation between the government and private sector especially hotel operators is needed to provide efficient transportation to tourists.

Also, Terengganu needs to intensify its efforts in promoting the culture and uniqueness to continue attracting tourists. The power of social media that easily facilitates the dissemination of news needs to be fully utilized. Every aspect deserves full attention and should not be taken lightly. This aspect of the promotion needs to be in line with the ads offered so that it does not cause frustration of the consumer and which can damage the image of the state of Terengganu.

The cancellation of the Visit Malaysia Year 2020 campaign is a proactive move announced by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. Malaysia and the rest of the world are now facing the global pandemic, COVID 19, which has caused all tourism activities by 2020 to be temporarily halted for the wellbeing of the world. However, the findings of this study are valuable after the end of this global crisis (Muhammad Yusri, 2020). This is due to the government's call to encourage the people to participate in restoring the country's economic stability through domestic tourism activities as outlined by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (Rafidah & Mohd Anwar, 2020). Given the current situation, it is believed that the country's tourism sector will recover and Terengganu will be swamped with tourists. Thus, the strengthening of the tourism industry through the efficiency of the transport sector and the cooperation of the telecommunications sector to ensure the comfort of tourists need to be enhanced.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion about the findings of the study, it is found that the majority of informants agree that public transport is easier to use and plays an important role in the main areas of tourist attractions. Frequent and continuous availability of buses is essential, especially during the holidays. In addition to facilitating tourists, bus and train services will also reduce the impact of environmental pollution compared to other transportations. This study shows that every tourist has differences in preference for transportation when traveling. Therefore, efforts to stimulate future studies to identify the consumer behavior of public transport selection should be carried out in detail. Besides that, the strengthening of the

telecommunications sector should also be enhanced as the lack of access to the internet restricts tourists' alternatives in choosing affordable transportation.

With this study being a preliminary exploration, it provides relevant insight into the tourism sector. Also, limited time constraints and budgets limit comprehensive data collection activities. However, the findings of this study can help create awareness and attract the attention of those directly involved in the tourism industry such as transportation and hotel sector providers to take proactive steps to strengthen their respective sectors. Further detailed studies need to be done to identify the elements of their respective sectors. The findings of this study contribute significantly to the enrichment of the literature in tourism and transportation. It also has positive implications for assisting tourism operators such as government and private agencies such as telecommunication service providers, e-hailing service providers, and other related agencies that are involved in strengthening the tourism system in Terengganu.

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