

## **The Need of Accessible Accommodation in Malaysian Tourism Sector: Case Study in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills National Parks**

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**Abstract:** Travel planning process usually take place few months prior to the travel. The main and crucial element in tourism expenditure is accommodation, especially for disabled tourists. Disabled tourists need to pay more attention in selecting the accessible accommodation because if they do not get a good rest, they do not enjoy the pleasure of their entire travel. The main aim of this study, is to investigate the level of accessibility in accommodation sector provided in Malaysian tourism, especially in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills National Parks. This study does not only focus on disabled tourists but all the categories of tourists, comprising children, teenagers, adults and even the elderly. The methods used in this study are observation and visual-method. From the study, it is found that all the accommodation provided here do not meet the requirement of people with disabilities as recommended by Tourism Services-Hotel and other types of tourism accommodation (MS1926:2006) and Code of Practice on Access for Disabled Persons to Public Buildings (MS1184:2002). The main aspects were tested are demographic information of the hotel, accessibility of the hotel, transportation, parking, reception, elevator, hallway, room, bathroom, bar, restaurant and recreation area. From the observation, it is also found that national parks staffs are not aware of the guidelines and the standards provided by the Malaysian government regarding tourism accommodation. Barriers keep away disabled community from experiencing opportunities in the travel and tourism industry. These barriers can be reduced with further research, explaining the significance of providing barrier-free environment in public recreation accommodation.

**Key words:** Accessibility, accommodation, disabled, national parks, tourists

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Travel and tour are considered, as an important factor in living quality of human being but the disabled people always is considered, as people with misfortune in this matter because they are excluded from the targeted group for tour. Many researches are showing that tourism sectors which consists of transportation, accommodations, food and beverages and attractions does not comply the acts and provisions for the disabled. Research also showing that tourism sectors is not meeting the needs and requirements of the disabled tourists with the thinking that the disabled population is too small and less number of them plan for tour. All the facilities in the tourism industry are not available for disabled tourists because in the past, the number of disabled people in society is very less but the situation has changed now. About 10% of the world total population is disabled people. For years, the tourism industry has paid little attention to tourists with disabilities but now things start to change. The industry starts to realize their importance and open the market by giving opportunity for disabled to travel as well.

The increment in the disabled tourists in the tourism sector has resulted in the existence of demand for the provision of special facilities for the disabled person in the national parks, so that they can also have the easy access to the facilities without needing help from the third party. However, the facilities provided in the parks currently not disabled-friendly. Now-a-days, most of the tourism environment is not appropriate for the use of people with limitation without assistance from others. It is now very clear to us that further future study needs to be done in the field of information and communications for facilitating the requirements of people with mobility limitation. This research does not seek to review niche market or narrow down the market segments but aims to open new tourism segments to 100% population without any discrimination in terms of sex, physical condition, ability and others (Sanmargaraja and Wee, 2013).

Accessibility in tourism industry is still in infant stage in Malaysia, this is because there is not much research done in this area to improve the current situation. Level of awareness about the Malaysian society is considered very low compared to European countries. Several

program carried out to raise the awareness on the importance of accessible tourism and it is believe will bring a remarkable impact to Malaysian tourism. Therefore, as one of the step to promote accessible tourism, this research aims to study the situation faced by the disabled tourists in the Malaysian National Parks. This research study aims to investigate the level of accessibility in accommodation sector provided in Malaysian tourism, especially in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills National Parks.

**Review of literature:** Disability no longer means a condition, an incapacity or lack that belongs to a body but rather a product of the interactions between self, society, body and the variety of interactions (from political economies to personal commitments) that they engender (Snyder, 2007). Impairment has been defined as lacking part or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body. Handicap is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by disability (Finkelstein, 1980). Barnes (2011) stated that the International Classification of Impairments Disability and Handicap (ICIDH) use different terms such as impairment, disability and handicap. Impairment is defined as any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function. Disability is defined, as any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Handicap is defined, as a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from impairment or a disability that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors) for that individual.

The definition of disability set out in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and described in this guidance is the only definition relevant to determining whether someone is a disabled person for the purposes of the act. The underlying cause of the impairment may be hard to establish. There may be adverse effects which are both physical and mental in nature. Furthermore, effects of a mainly physical nature may stem from an underlying mental impairment and vice versa. It is not necessary to consider how impairment is caused, even if the cause is a consequence of a condition which is excluded. For example, liver disease as a result of alcohol dependency would count as impairment, although alcoholism itself is expressly excluded from the scope of the definition of disability in the act. For example, a woman has obesity which gives rise to impairments such as mobility restrictions and breathing difficulties. She is unable to walk >50 yards without having to rest. This means obesity is also a form hidden disability (TSO, 2006).

According to UNESCO (1995), accurate figures on a world-wide scale are difficult to collect. Many countries have not carried out research and definitions of disability and impairment vary. In many respects, the figures given are a poverty or development index. Lower socioeconomic status and higher poverty levels are directly associated with higher numbers of disabled people. According to United Nations estimates, there are 500 million disabled people worldwide. According to Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia, total population of Malaysia is 269,741,000 people. From this total population, there are 147,718,000 people are Malays, 65,174,000 people are Chinese, 19,599,000 people are Indians and 2,456,000 people are other religion. Population of disabled people was 248,858 people in the year 2008 but this number increase to 359,203 people in the year 2011 as shown in Table 1.

Tourism is a rapidly growing industry in the Asian and Pacific region and people with disabilities and older persons are becoming a growing group of consumers of travel, sports and other leisure-oriented products and services. People with disability have a right to and do want to enjoy travel leisure experiences. Furthermore with regard to physical access, families with young children who are also becoming part of this increasing tourist market have similar needs to persons with disabilities and older persons. However, their travel experiences are still characterized by transportation constraints, inaccessible accommodation and tourism sites and inadequate customer services. Thus, large numbers of people require tourism to be made barrier-free. Most hotels, transportation facilities and tourist sites are not physically accessible for many people with disabilities and older persons. Their staff members have not been trained to provide disabled person-friendly services (United Nation Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, 2000).

Table 1: Registered disabled people by state in Malaysia

States	Years			
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Johor	30,840	35,096	37,411	43,610
Kedah	17,720	21,854	24,841	26,829
Kelantan	22,229	24,893	27,554	31,611
Malacca	11,322	13,736	15,874	18,325
Negeri Sembilan	12,058	14,089	15,843	18,172
Pahang	10,062	12,242	14,382	19,822
Perak	26,310	29,946	31,326	34,630
Perlis	4,374	4,719	4,971	5,587
Pulau Pinang	15,855	18,223	20,831	23,183
Sabah	14,087	15,546	17,407	19,936
Sarawak	13,719	13,961	15,374	18,036
Selangor	34,311	40,107	45,287	51,238
Terengganu	14,828	16,404	18,941	21,398
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	20,570	22,003	23,406	25,940
W.P. Labuan	573	693	799	886
Total	248,858	283,512	314,247	359,203

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35% of people over 65 have some type of disability are the people who plan for travelling more often than younger generations (Alen *et al.*, 2012). Malaysia is also considered in the group of countries which provide inaccessible tourism. None of the Malaysian travel agencies offers any tour packages that cater specifically for elderly and disabled people. Accessible tourist locations are also very few. There is no website giving information about accommodation which caters disabled tourists needs. Many service providers in Malaysia having the narrow mentality which blocks the new development in facilities for the disabled tourists. There must be a change in perception of providing disabled friendly facilities from extra cost to investment.

Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities constitute still another set of challenges. For example, very few hotels offer accessible disabled person-friendly rooms with wider entrances; low-level switches, hand dryers, towels racks and beds; chair lifts and room information written in simple and concise language for people with cognitive disabilities. Interestingly, the standard design used for many hotel rooms in the United Nation Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region does not reflect the anthropomorphic measurements of shorter travellers in Asia but those of 6-foot tall persons who are perhaps not in the majority of people within the region who travel. Of the rooms available, few have ground floor access. Access throughout hotels is also problematic. Few hotels have lifts to all floors on slow timers, access to reception, pool and bar areas, clear signage, visual alarms and clear access through the entire building. While the majority of hotels provide special parking areas, often these are uncovered and quite distant from the main hotel entrances, requiring that steps be negotiated in order to access the buildings (United Nation Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, 2000).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study has been conducted at the recreation park in Johor, especially in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills. Johor National Parks Corporation has several parks under

their supervision such as Endau-Rompin, Ledang Hills, Mersing Islands, Tanjung Piai and Kukup Island. There is only 2 parks provide accommodation for the tourists, such as Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills, therefore these places is chosen for this research. The design consisted of a literature review, observations and visual method. The focus of this study is on facilities inside and outside of the accommodation provided in the Johor National Parks and the data were compared between the study locations. Many researches have been conducted in this area due to the development of the Iskandar Development Region (IDR) and South Johor Economic Region (SJER). Tourism market in the study area is increasing from year to year and this is contributing to the economy. Accurate data is shown clearly in Table 2.

From Table 2, it is found that number of Malaysian tourists visiting Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills are increasing but then number of non-citizen of Malaysia is decreasing from the year 2010-2012. This is because many of the international tourists disappointed with the hospitality and facilities provided there due to their higher expectation. National parks in Johor State, also were closed for several months for maintenance and this can be another factor for tourists to be declined.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Endau-Rompin has well-established infrastructural facilities, including a Visitor Complex, chalets, dormitories, cafeteria, multi-purpose hall, a Nature Education and Research Centre, surau (prayer room), suspension bridges and boat jetty. Within the Visitor Complex, there is an office, an audiovisual room, library and info-gallery. A boat service from Peta village to the Nature Education and Research Centre and Kuala Jasin is provided by the local villagers. Peta is a small aborigine's village situated near Endau-Rompin National Park.

According to Table 3, it is found that accommodation in Endau-Rompin is divided into 4 namely at the Visitor Complex, at Kuala Jasin, at the Nature Education and Research Centre (NERC) and Campsites. Campsites are divided into 4 different areas, such as Pantai Burung (15 min walk from Visitor Complex), Kuala Jasin (40 min boat ride from Visitor Complex plus 15 min walk), Kuala

Table 2: No. of tourists to Johor National Park from 2010-2012

	2010		2011		2012		Total
	Malaysian citizen	Non-citizen of Malaysia	Malaysian citizen	Non-citizen of Malaysia	Malaysian citizen	Non-citizen of Malaysia	
National park							
Endau Rompin	3,515	968	2,396	768	2,453	764	10,864
Ledang Hill	10,838	4,038	17,837	2,178	26,431	1,738	63,060
Total	14,353	5,006	20,233	2,946	28,884	2,502	73,924

Marong (40 min boat ride from Visitor Complex plus 1 h 30 min walk) and Batu Hampar (40 min boat ride from Visitor Complex plus 2 h walk). Clear data is shown in Table 3.

Ledang Hills has been rated the 6th most difficult mountain to climb in the country and all who had tried it will attest to how physically and mentally demanding it can be. Still about 15,000 climbers set out scale it each year. No mountain climbers in the country can seriously claim to be one until he or she has go at Ledang Hills. Types of accommodation in Ledang Hills are shown clearly in Table 4.

Even though both of the national parks provided accommodations for the tourists but none of them are accessible for the disabled tourists, especially for wheelchair users and walking sticks users. One of the staff mention that both of the national parks does not provide disabled facilities because these 2 parks rarely visited by the disabled may be 1 or 2 throughout the year. Accommodations in the both of the national parks are equipped with stairs facilities that make disabled tourists

difficult to access it. Walking sticks users also feels difficult to walk about in nearby areas. Double deck bed provided in the dormitory room is not suitable for the use of disabled tourists and even to small children. Accommodation in travel destinations is provided for the non disabled tourists mainly because disabled tourists are the minority and mostly this group of people do not go for holidays. Things has changed now, disabled people also fighting for their rights and seeking for opportunity to travel around the world without thinking of the disability. Disability cannot be considered as a disease but should be considered as a special gift. Result of auditing in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills accommodation areas is shown in Table 5.

From Table 5, it is found that even though Johor National Parks Corporation (JNPC) provided accommodations for the tourists but none of these accommodations can be used by the disabled tourists. Accommodation is the most important factor in planning for a holiday or vacations. There is no information given in the Johor Parks websites regarding type of

Table 3: No. of accommodation provided in Endau-Rompin

Accommodations	Standard chalets		3 bedroom family chalets		Dormitory		Campsite
	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	Capacity (person)
Visitor Complex	15	2	6	15	2	74	-
Kuala Jasin	10	2	3	15	-	-	90
NERC	-	-	-	-	2	128	-
Pantai Burung	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
Kuala Marong	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
Batu Hampar	-	-	-	-	-	-	30

Table 4: No. of accommodation provided in Ledang Hills

Accommodations	Standard chalets		Jungle hut		Dormitory		Campsite
	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	No. (units)	Capacity (person)	Capacity (person)
Ledang Hills	8	4	24	2-3	2	100	90

Table 5: List of audited accommodation facilities in Endau-Rompin and Ledang Hills

Facilities	Endau-Rompin	Ledang Hills	Remarks
<b>Bathroom</b>			
A combined toilet and washroom of special design with water closet, wash basin and either a bath or shower with fixed seat	✓	×	Ledang Hills: There is no special design in bathroom Endau-Rompin: There were 2 disabled bathroom but not well maintained
At the door from bedroom there should not be any raised threshold to jumped over while the drop down should be minimal and ramped rather than vertical	×	×	There is no ramp in both of the national park Endau-Rompin: There is no hot water service
Taps should have central mixer outlets and hot pipes should be lagged for safety for the blind	×	×	Ledang Hills: There is no disabled bathrooms provided
The floor should be of non-slip material	✓	✓	
<b>Furniture</b>			
The high and low limits of wheelchairs user's reach must be remembered for furniture provided whether built-in or installed later. For example, rails to hang clothing, drawers and shelved should be at height within each reach	✓	✓	Endau-Rompin: The rails for hanging clothes is too high
Avoid sharp corners for the safety of the blind	✓	✓	No sharp corners
<b>Fixtures</b>			
Switches, plugs, telephone, window fastening should be placed within easy reach	×	×	Electrical fittings in both of areas were too high for wheelchair users and visual impairment tourists

Table 5: Continue

Facilities	Endau-Rompin	Ledang Hills	Remarks
<b>Bed</b>			
For ease of transfer the height of the made-up bed should be about the same as the wheelchair seat with cushion (450-550 mm)	×	×	Bed in both areas is higher than the finished Floor level and double deck bed are provided
To assist movement when on the bed, a monkey pole or similar device should be installed on request	×	×	No device is fixed in both areas
<b>Layout</b>			
There should be no step at the door into the corridor. Within the bedroom there should be ample floor	×	×	There is steps and stairs in both areas
Some wheelchair users are accustomed to bring their transfers (bed, bath) from one side and some from the other, so it is good to have such rooms available in 2 mirror-image versions	×	×	The areas around the bed is too small and it does not allow another mirror-image within the areas
<b>Signals</b>			
The door bell, besides ringing should actuate a flashing light for the to see	×	×	This facilities is not available in both of deaf the areas
<b>Outside</b>			
On the outside of the door within easy reach, there should be an embossed or Braille number which the can sight impaired can feel	×	×	This facilities is not available in both of the areas

accommodations provided. It will be trouble some for the disabled tourists, even senior citizens to go to the national park without knowing that accommodations in both of the national parks are in accessible. Most websites that mention disabilities travel in Malaysia give general overviews and most of the people pointed out that it is not easy to travel with a disability in Malaysia.

Ministry of tourism need to be alert with this problem. Ministry should come out with several policy so that there will be no double standard situation occurs during the design and planning process. Disabled people cannot be overlooked and ignored anymore because they can be the potential tourists who will create a new tourism market. Ministry should come out with a star rating system which can give rating to the facilities provided in the new building so that can be use by all including people with all disabilities. For the old buildings, maintenance and renovation need to be done to improve the quality of the facilities provided. Increment in disabled people and senior citizens in the population are showing that the future tourism markets will be occupied by them in a greater portion.

## CONCLUSION

Johor National Parks Corporation, also not keen about making publicity in print and mass media causes people to not know much about a place of recreation provided by this corporation. Understanding the wider issues of tourist accessibility is paramount to positive tourist experiences. However, the challenges associated with ensuring that disabled person can freely move within and between urban environments must be fully understood before access can be sufficiently planned and managed. Tourist accessibility comprises all the tourism markets including aged person and people with

disabilities who have been classified as specific groups. There are important structural barriers among all the barriers outlined that may constrain the experiences of this group in urban centers. With this in mind, it is necessary to evaluate access and overcome the barriers to create tourism for all concept. All the facilities in tourism destination should accessible and usable by all regardless any type of disabilities.

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