



SUSTAINABLE ECO-TOURISM: A case study of Marang resort and safari, Malaysia.

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Abstract

In the early days of man's origin, movement from place to place was solely in search of food and new localization. This need grew insatiable in the areas of clothing, shelter, healthcare, recreation, economic growth, education, etc. innovations in transportation and the new media also helped to escalate growth in the sector of tourism. Man's activities in the built up areas and advances in science and technology has led to serious environmental degradation which poses a serious risk on our wellbeing on planet earth. Addressing this environmental issues contributed by tourist activities each year, brought about the establishment of global sustainable tourism council (GSTC) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Tourism is about putting people and the planet first. This study investigates the architecture and design of Marang resort, Malaysia and how it addresses this trending environmental issues. A further research was done to ascertain the project contribution to its local community, environmental impact and the application of materials and method of construction. This Author concludes by given recommendations for further research. The research method employed was document analysis, online review and analysing of already published research on in the sector of sustainable tourism and eco-resorts.

Keywords: *Sustainability, Tourism, Eco-tourism. Resort planning, Marang resort.*

Introduction

In the last years, the interest in green and environmentally friendly products and services has increased notably. The society is more concerned about the fragile environment and customers are willing to spend more money on products that seem to help in protecting the environment. According to (Christof, 2001) nowadays "*eco means big business*". In the tourism business terms like sustainable tourism, ecotourism and alternative tourism are becoming popular. In this regard he mentions that the eco-tourism segment is one of the fastest growing markets in the tourism sector. In this regard, the question whether environmentally friendly products exist only to make money or if the producers/service providers really want to support the environmental protection remains unanswered (Eggeling, 2010). Sustainable Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to the preservation of the planet and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-2030).

According to the World Tourism Organization, the amount of international arrivals is expected to increase dramatically until 2020. The organization expects that 1.6 billion arrivals can be reached by then but fell short of the target due to unexpected Covid-19 Pandemic towards the fall of 2019 through 2020. See Figure 1.1 for details.

"Around the world, in countries at all development levels, many millions of jobs and businesses are dependent on a strong and thriving tourism sector. Tourism has also been a driving force in protecting natural and cultural heritage, preserving them for future generations to enjoy". (Zurab Pololikashvili, 2001) UNWTO Secretary-General.

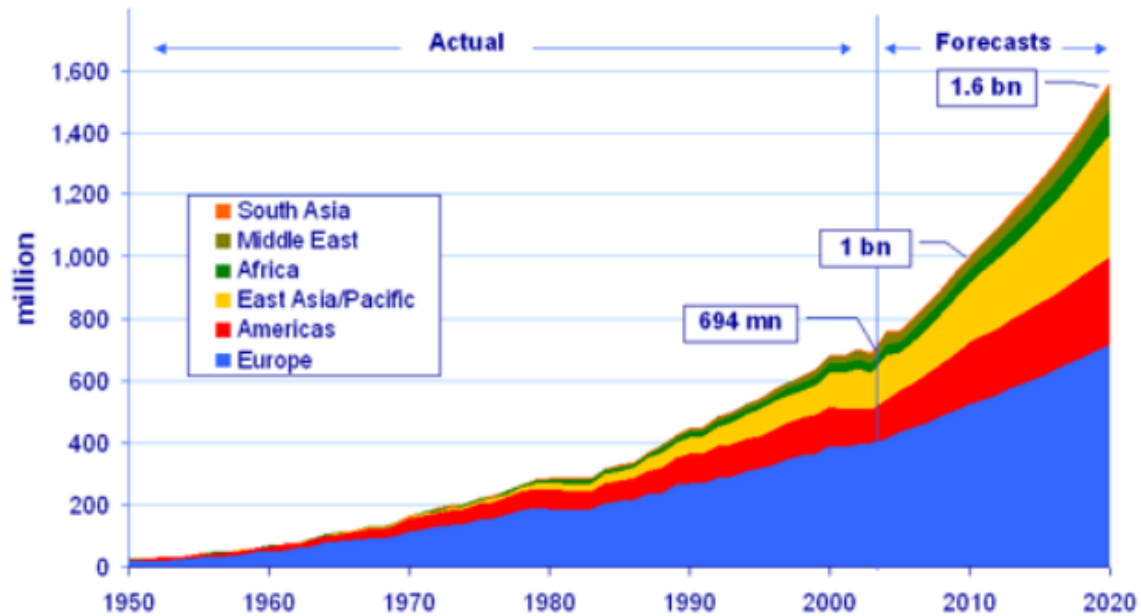


Figure 1.1 'UNWTO' Tourism vision, 2020. Retrieved from (Eggeling, 2010) as originally cited in UNWTO website.

Environmental concerns began to trend after the booming of industrial age. The concern arises due to harmful effluents and discharges of industries output causing health problems and deterioration of natural environment. Hospitality industry is among the industries which are posing negative impacts on the environment. The cumulative impacts from all the small operation can be consider significant in terms of resource consumption and if environmental management is not considered in operations, it can leave a significant footprint in the environment.

"This crisis is an opportunity to rethink the tourism sector and its contribution to the people and planet; an opportunity to build back better towards a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector that ensure the benefits of tourism are enjoyed widely and fairly." (Zurab Pololikashvili, 2001)
UNWTO Secretary-General.

Sustainable tourism is an industry which possesses the potential to fulfil different social-economic needs, cultural needs, and serves as a catalyst for ensuring resilience and conservation of the natural environment. Sustainable tourism, simultaneously promotes unity in diversity, environmental health, cultural identity, eradication of poverty and leads to economic development while fostering shared prosperity for all.

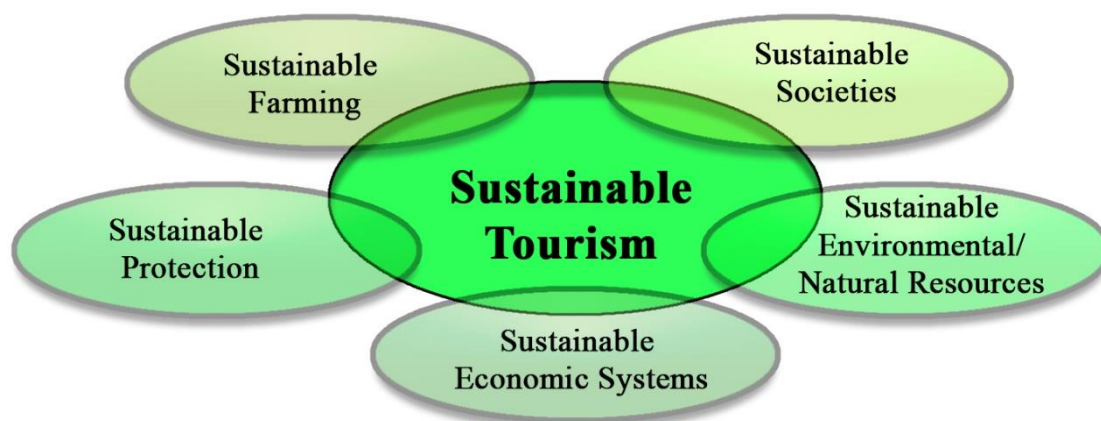


Figure 1.1 the relation between sustainable tourism and sustainable development. Adapted from: (Barazesh, 2011)

1.2 Aim

The aim of this research work is to investigate the various existing approach of best practices in Resort planning and development and how it can be adopted for sustainability and revitalization of tourist destinations.

1.3 Objectives

- i. To study the factors relevant to architecture in Eco-Tourism resort planning and design for sustainable development
- ii. To make recommendations on appropriate architecture and design of Eco-Tourism resort for sustainable design development.
- iii. To explore how Marang resort conserved the environment through eco-tourism development.

1.4 Research questions

- i. What are the factors relevant to architecture in Eco-Tourism resort planning and design for sustainable development?
- ii. What recommendations can be made for the appropriate architecture and design of Eco-Tourist resorts?
- iii. What design principles approach was used by the Architects and developers of Marang Resort and Safari that qualifies it as a sustainable Eco-Tourism project?

1.6 Definition of Terms

- a. **Tourism:** A social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These are called visitors which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents. Tourism has to do with their activities which imply tourism expenditure (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2008).
- b. **Alternative Tourism:** Forms of Tourism generally characterized by small scale sustainable activities.
- c. **Sustainable Development:** Economic development that is conducted without depletion of natural resources. Another definition of sustainable development comes from Farrell (1992) who said that sustainable development is “the need to find a balance in the development system between economy, environment, and society in such a way that no aspect outweighs another one, in other words that the three aspects are equal. Figure 2.1 summarizes the theoretical framework of sustainable development and tourism.
- d. **Eco-tourist:** people who require environmentally compatible recreational opportunities, where nature rather than humanity predominates. According to the International Ecotourism Society, Eco tourists are experienced travellers who are more likely to have a college/university degree and have a higher income bracket. Eco tourists are expecting discovery and enlightenment from their ecotourism experience. Personal growth in emotional, spiritual, as well as intellectual terms, appear to be expected outcomes from ecotourism travel for the majority of these travellers.

According to “The Brundtland Report” in 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), convened by the United Nations (UN), published Our Common Future. The WCED was created to address the growing global concern over the accelerating deterioration of natural resources and the human environment. In the report, sustainability is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). Since then all the nation have clear targets to reduce pollution from their industries using the concept of sustainability. This report placed environmental issues firmly on the

UN's political agenda. The report concluded that long-term economic growth could only be achieved with the sustainable use of environmental resources; hence, the term "sustainable development" was coined (WCED, 1987). The report offers five basic principles of sustainability according to (Bramwell & Bernard, 1993):

1. Holistic planning and strategy making.
2. Preservation of essential ecological processes.
3. Protection of human heritage and biodiversity.
4. Development that fosters long-term productivity sustainable for future generations.
5. The goal of achieving a better balance of equity among nations.

2.0 Literature Review

Tourism can be a force for good in our World; playing a part in protecting our planet and its biodiversity and celebrating what makes us human. From discovering new places and cultures, to connecting with new people and experiences. . António Guterres, (2020). UN Secretary-General

2.1 Eco-Tourism

Ecotourism, as an alternative tourism, involves visiting natural areas in order to learn, to study, or to carry out activities environmentally friendly, that is, a tourism based on the nature experience, which enables the economic and social development of local communities. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their habitats, as well as cultural artefacts from the locality. (Kiper, 2013).

Ecotourism can sometimes be referred to as nature tourism or ecology travel. According to the International ecotourism society, ecotourism can be defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and inclusive education for both staff and visitor's" (International ecotourism society, n.d.)

There are many well recognized definitions that have formed a clear picture of its core principles, which are shown in Table 2.0

Table 2.0. Definitions of Ecotourism.

Ceballos Lascurain (1987) (Joshi, 2011)	Ecotourism is defined as travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying scenery and its wild animals and plants as well as existing.
Conservation International (Ziffer, 1989).	A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited areas through labor or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents.
The National Ecotourism Strategy (1994) (Quick Start Guide to a Tourism Business, 2006)	Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. This definition recognises that 'natural environment' included cultural components and that 'ecologically sustainable' involves an appropriate return to the local community and long term conservation of the resource
McCormick, 1994	Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people

World Conservation Union (Brandon, 1996)	Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.
Honey, 1999	Travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveller; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights.
Weaver, 1999	Interest in ecotourism, now widespread among tourism planners and marketers, is rationalized by a number of popular assumptions regarding the sector's potential economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits
Weaver, 2001	Ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of the natural environment, or some component thereof, within its associated cultural context

According to Ceballos-Lascurain, ecotourism is the ‘travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals; as well as any existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in these areas.’ These definition recognizes that ‘natural environment’ includes cultural components and that ‘ecologically sustainable’ involves an appropriate return to the local community and long-term conservation of the resource. Ecotourism can be further divided into the following classification namely:

- i. Cultural;
- ii. Educational;
- iii. Scientific
- iv. Adventure
- v. Agro-tourism (rural, farm, ranch).

Ecotourism has become the fastest growing sector of the entire Tourism industry due to increase in trend of environmental concerns, with an increase of 4.3% between 2008 and 2017 in the world tourism sector. The pressure of urban living and migration has also led to people seeking solitude with nature, therefore, increasing the numbers of visitors to national parks and other protected areas. Sustainable ecotourism is characterized by the following:

- Minimizes adverse effects of economic and other social activities,
- Involves travel to natural destinations either inhabited or uninhabited
- Builds environmental awareness by educating the tourist, residence of nearby communities, and staff.
- Provides direct financial benefit; raise funds for research and environmental protection.
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment of the local community at large and
- Supports democracy of movement, human rights and respect for culture in diversity.

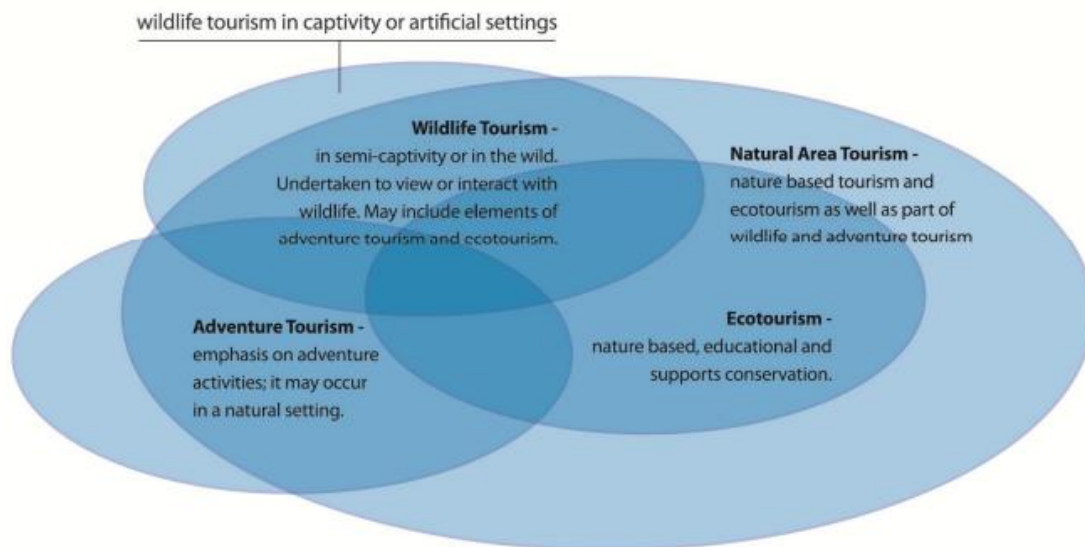


Figure 2.1. Relationship between Eco-tourism and other forms of alternative tourism. (Hill & Gale, 2009).

3.0 Case Studies.

The selected case study for this research is Marang resort and safari, located in Terengganu, Malaysia. The case study was analysed based on the sustainable features, economic, social and environmental impacts it has contributed to its host community and the influence and recognition it has over many other ecotourist locations all over the world.

3.1 Findings

- Car parks located at both ends only; as a sustainable mobility approach which allows visitors to walk round to access the entire site and feel the environment.



Figure 3.1. Site plan of Marang Resort. Source: (Mukin & Daerah, 2013)

Project Title: Marang Resort and Safari, Malaysia.

Project Type/Sector: Commercial/Resort

Year of Completion: 1995

Owners/Developers/Managers: The resort is owned and developed by Turnaround Managers Inc. (TMI), a management practice that specializes in turning around troubled or failing projects. The project

management and operations of the resort were undertaken by its wholly owned subsidiary, Tenggara Gugusan Holidays (TEGUH).

Architect: AsSaffa Design Practice/Bahar Omar Architect

Contractor: Abu & Rakan-Rakan

Directions: From Kuala Terengganu Airport: Head south along the Kuala Terengganu-Kuantan trunk road. Marang Resort & Safaris is located off the trunk road 8 kilometers (4.97 miles) south of the town of Marang. Driving time: Approximately 45 minutes.

Awards:

- (Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia) PAM-Awards, 1997 for excellence in Architecture. Achieved in hotel/resort building category.
- FIABCI Award, 1996 (winner of the resort development and green awards; Malaysia chapter.)
- FIABCI (International real estate Federation) Award, 1997.
- Agha Khan Award (Invitation to submit, 1997)
- National habitat Award, 199 (Excellence in innovation towards optimal Human habitation. (Kementrian Perumahan & Tempatan.)

Sustainable Features:

- Careful preservation of the natural environment,
- Extensive involvement of local artisans and carpenters,
- Resort staff recruited from local villagers,
- Local building materials,
- Minimum disruption to wildlife and vegetation,
- Materials ferried across the river on wooden rafts and pontoon bridges to preserve river wildlife and vegetation,
- Use of traditional "sanggora" baked-clay roof tiles,
- International holiday resort where 80 percent of the guests are foreigners.

Executive Summary:

Marang Resort is composed with the concept of 'genius loci' or sense of place, creating a relationship between man and his natural environment. An environmentally sustainable resort village development located on 65 acres of mangrove swamp in a rural area on the east coast of Malaysia. The award-winning eco-resort, which faces the South China Sea, includes 100 detached wooden chalets, a restaurant, a conference hall, and other facilities. Completed in 1995, the resort features 2.5 kilometres of sandy beach and represents a harmonious blend of traditional and simple, modern forms, attuned to the natural landscape and the life of the local community. (ULI Development Case studies, 1998).

- Jungle paths, river bridges, and raised wooden walkways punctures the Mangrove, connecting access to across the river, the chalet unit and different areas of the resort



Figure 3.4 jungle paths and river bridges. (Mukin & Daerah, 2013)

- Careful preservation of the natural environment and a serene ambiance of relationship.



Figure 3.2 A view of the Ecolodges and water body. Source: (Mukin & Daerah, 2013)

- By limiting land clearing and land filling and by siting chalets among the coconut and mangrove trees, development of the Marang Resort caused minimal disruption of existing topography and flora and fauna. The project is built as a Malay Village. Kampung houses are built on Stilts and scattered in clusters along the river bank.

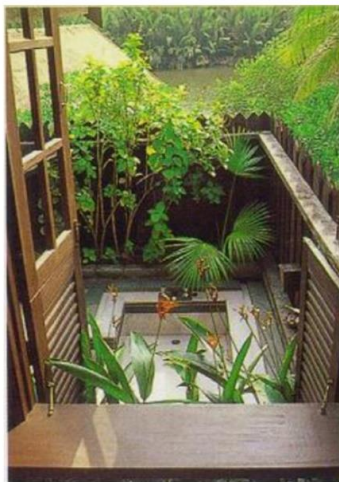


Figure 3.2 view of the chalets/Ecolodges among the coconuts and mangrove trees. (Mukin & Daerah, 2013)

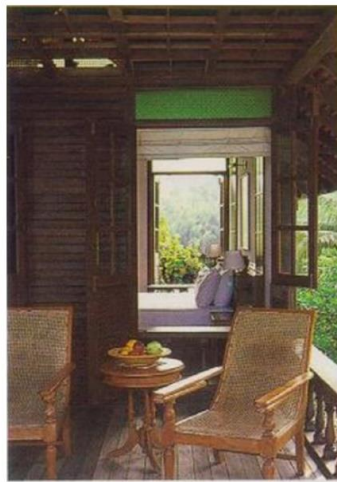
- The resort features cascading swimming pool and relaxation deck.



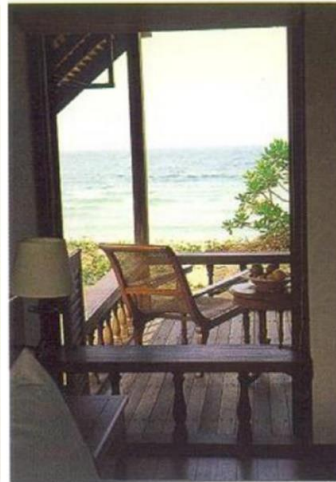
Figure 3.5. Cascading Swimming pool and deck.



View from Bedroom window, open bath and river



Design ensures for good ventilation and extensive use of local materials and artisans for construction.



View from Bedroom window deck and sea.

Figure 3.5. Views from other interior spaces.

- Other Modern comfort such as hot showers, refrigerator, air conditioning, etc. Can be found in the rooms.



Figure 3.6. Interior room spaces.

3.2 Project Data

Table 3.1. Project Data. Adapted from: (ULI Development Case studies, 1998)

PROJECT DATA

LAND USE INFORMATION

Site area: 65 acres

Natural reserve: 45 acres

Parking: 7,500 square feet

Use	Gross building area (square feet)
Lobby/reception areas	1,380
Guestrooms	52,080
Restaurant/lounges	3,200
Convention/meeting space	4,816
Library	256
Administrative offices	512
Back-of-house (service)	1,890
Circulation	1,221
Total	65,355

GUEST ROOM INFORMATION¹

Type	Number	Average size (square feet)
Deluxe seaview	35	640.4
Standard seaview	13	456.4
Standard kampung	13	456.4
Riverine bagan	39	456.4
Total	100	

Room rates/night: RM120 to RM250²

¹Each room is housed in an individual chalet.

²Denominated in Malaysian Ringgit (RM).

DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Planning started: January 1991

Construction started: October 1992

Project completed: August 1995

4.0 Discussions.

4.1 General Description

The economic explosion in Pacific Rim markets, until recently, had created a fast-growing resort industry. While it is relatively easy to find boutique resorts, less common are eco-resorts with understated vernacular architecture that reflects the local community's organization, way of life, and values. Marang Resort & Safaris is such a resort—an example of peaceful coexistence between man and nature.

Construction began in 1992; artisans and carpenters from surrounding villages were recruited to do most of the work. Most building materials also came from the local area. To ensure minimum disruption to river wildlife and vegetation, materials were ferried across the river on wooden rafts and temporary pontoon bridges. Similarly, workers used only hand tools and light machinery in the resort's construction. According to an environmental impact assessment (EIA) by a team of researchers from the Malaysia's Bureau of Consultancy and Development at University Kebangsaan, the resort "has done a commendable job in maintaining the natural environment of the area." (ULI Development Case studies, 1998).

The resort is an environmentally sustainable development sculpted from 65 acres of mangrove swamp in the district of Marang, a rural area on the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. The rural community, where the main occupations are fishing and farming, is approximately 25 kilometers (15.5 miles) south of Kuala Terengganu, the capital city of the state of Terengganu. The 65-acre development consists of 100 detached wooden chalets clustered on 20 acres and leisure facilities that include a swimming pool, library, BBQ patio, 150-seat restaurant, 200-seat multi-purpose conference hall, and a children's adventure park. Activities include many types of water sports as well as jungle and sea safaris and other excursions.

4.2 Site and Development

Sandy-soil vegetation and coconut trees are found on the resort's beach front, while mangrove trees and nipah palms grow along the riverbanks. The river is rich in the life typical of a mangrove wetland. In the vicinity to the north, west, and south are picturesque kampungs (villages) and coconut smallholdings, with small offshore islands close by. A small, low-budget inn developed earlier also was present. Because of the site's unique environmental attributes and beauty, it was decided that any development must not unduly disrupt the existing topography or flora and fauna. Three conditions formed the guiding spirit of the project: that it be wholly Malaysian, from concept to construction and operation; that environmental disruption be minimal; and that local residents be meaningfully involved at all stages of its development and operation. To minimize disruption to the fragile mangrove ecosystem, very little land clearing and land filling were done. Rather than fell the coconut and mangrove trees, chalets were sited among them. The result is a resort that provides a place for a "truly Malaysian experience," combining the best of nature, adventure, and culture with modern amenities. (ULI Development Case studies, 1998).

4.3 Planning and Design

The overall sustainable planning concept was borrowed from the traditional Malay riverine village settlement, or kampung. Archetypal kampung houses, typically designed to be built on stilts along the riverbank and beach, were "inserted" into the existing environment with minimal land clearing and filling. Like Malay houses, they are spaced out in clusters, a community organization style that reflects the local way of life and values. The actual siting of buildings sought to preserve the natural setting, generally leaving the topography and ecology of the place undisturbed. The project was built in harmony with the natural elements in order to evoke the spirit of the place, its "genus loci," and thus absorb its ambience.

As guests approach from the main gateway and parking area, the natural features of the site define the public, semi-public, and private spaces. The reception lounge, restaurant, and swimming pool are located in the semi-public area on one side of the riverbank. The river creates a natural boundary separating the more private area along the far bank of the river and the beach, where the chalets are scattered in clusters. Jungle paths and river bridges link the various parts of the resort, and raised wooden walkways lead to buildings along the riverbanks. As in Malay houses, spaces are defined by the hierarchy of public, semi-public, and private spaces, expressed in the transition from an open veranda to a small lounge vestibule to a bedroom with a double bed or twin beds. The bathroom is located at the back of the house in a private courtyard, which, in the Deluxe Chalets, features an outdoor marble bath. Full-length louvered windows in the bedroom and vestibule/sitting area allow the entire chalet to be opened up to the outdoors and cooling sea breezes. While the architecture is traditional, the chalets are equipped with the modern comforts of air conditioning, hot showers, and refrigerators—but no telephones to disturb guests. An interesting feature is the use of sanggora roof tiles, which are made of baked clay and are typical in this part of Malaysia and the southern region of Thailand.

Water is supplied to the chalets for bathing and washing (but not for drinking) by tubewells sunk into the ground. The water is pumped and passed through a treatment system to remove odor, bacteria, and coloration before being distributed to the individual chalets. Due to the topography and water table of the area, fresh drinking water is obtained off site throughout the year for the use of guests. The site does

not permit laying sewage pipes to connect the individual houses. An aerobic sewage treatment system using independent "Supersept SS-2" units was installed instead; the environmental impact assessment report described it as "highly effective."

Development and building approvals were issued by the Marang District Authority, which generally has been supportive of the project. A number of public agencies also were involved in the approval process, notably the Department of Drainage and Irrigation for supervision of overall drainage of the site and wastewater drainage; the Department of Environment for environmental preservation and conservation and environmental impact assessment; the Fire and Rescue Department for the overall layout, building materials, and fire prevention measures; the Rural and Town Planning Department for assessment of the development's impact on the community and the rural area; and the public utilities for electricity, water, and telecommunication services. (ULI Development Case studies, 1998)

4.4 Community Benefits

Ecotourism has been identified as "the way of the future." In its purest sense, it attempts to create economic value for the preservation of pristine environments and indigenous cultures. Marang Resort & Safaris has taken great care to involve the local community at all times by providing job opportunities and playing a critical role in spurring businesses for other travel-related industries such as handicrafts and heritage tours. It also generates revenue for the state through its mostly foreign and out-of-state guests. Also through its foreign guests, particularly Europeans, the resort helps to promote Malaysia as a preferred tourist destination. The development also has been visited by students from many universities in the region to study the mangrove ecosystem, resort architecture and management, and hotel catering. Thus, the resort functions as a teaching institution, providing valuable practical knowledge to students as well as to its guests and the public. Study visits are being extended to schoolchildren to instil in them an early appreciation of nature and Terengganu's heritage. (ULI Development Case studies, 1998).

4.5 Environmental Impact

The ecology of the mangrove swamp is delicate, and its mangroves and nipah palms conceal a wealth of river life. Accordingly, the clearing of vegetation for infrastructure development was a challenge. Only the minimal area required for development has been cleared. To protect the mangrove undergrowth, even in the developed areas, no earth filling was done with the exception of the site of the conference hall and parking areas. The EIA report concluded that the resort's development has resulted in no reduction in either beach or mangrove flora species. The developed mangrove patches can still support aquatic and invertebrate fauna, and since the rooting system of the mangrove is still intact, soil fertility has not been affected.

The development of the resort has had no serious or permanent impact on water quality in the river, and there has been minimal or no impact on seawater quality. The selected clearing of vegetation and the replanting of exposed areas with trees, shrubs, herbs, palms, and grasses help to reduce soil erosion. Because it is situated on the shore of the South China Sea and on the banks of the Sungai Palau Kerengga, the resort may be subject to the natural force of beach and riverbank erosion, and management has developed a practical contingency plan to deal with it. Built structures within the development are monitored for soundness on a regular basis, and the resort maintenance team also conducts periodic visual inspections to check for structural damage or movement. (ULI Development Case studies, 1998)

4.5 Experience Gained

- To demonstrate a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility, the development team opted to involve local residents directly in the development and operation of the resort. Everyone involved benefited the developer, the local community, and the guests.
- By creating a truly Malaysian experience, the resort fits into the local context. Local employees give the resort a local flavor and prevent isolation of the resort from the rural community.

Malaysian hospitality has resulted in service with genuine warmth and in the reinforcement of native values.

- Ecotourism's emphasis on local resources and employment makes it attractive to developing countries. The economic impact from increased tourism and local job growth has benefited the resort, the local community, the state, and the country.
- Because of the selective infrastructure development strategy adopted by TEGUH, the impact of the resort on the diversity of plant species was minimal.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations.

The overriding principal in developing the resort was "Less is more." The end result is a resort that is a harmonious blend of traditional and simple, modern forms, attuned to the natural landscape and to the life of the local community. The development team has turned a failing resort into an ecologically sustainable, socially responsible, and economically feasible project.

The three conditions laid down: 'environment, social and economic impact' as a framework for development were followed throughout. In the process, the local people have participated meaningfully in the building and operation of an international resort and have shared in its socio-economic benefits. Ecotourism is a high-risk undertaking in both ecological and economic terms, but the development team believed that the resort's unique potential could be realized fully with sensitive planning, a good business plan, and hard work. TMI took a calculated risk. The reward was solid absorption that stimulated local job growth and did little to disrupt the environment.

It is recommended that conducting an environmental impact assessment (EIA) and following its recommendations, is of great importance as this assisted in the Marang resort's success. It is eminent that all stakeholders in the Tourism and hospitality industry should further develop sustainable structures and business models and act as a role model to motivate other businesses to follow.

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