



AL-SULTAN ABDULLAH
ROYAL TIGER RESERVE

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY LANDSCAPES IN ULU TEMBELING, JERANTUT





Boatmen await visitors at Kg. Gusai

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1 Executive Summary

This Sustainable Tourism Strategy was developed for the seven villages situated along the Upper Tembeling River in the buffer area of the Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve (ASARTR) and Taman Negara National Park. Although the villages are located outside the Reserve boundary, the establishment of the new State Park is certain to attract more visitors to this remote part of Peninsular Malaysia. The study focused on identifying strategies and approaches that optimise the potential tourism has to improve the livelihoods of local people while encouraging them to be more aware of conservation actions to safeguard biodiversity in this wildlife corridor, particularly the critically endangered Malayan tiger.

The study builds on the social and tourism components of *the Multi-disciplinary Study for the Tekai Landscape* (2023) conducted by Nature-based Solutions Sdn Bhd for Enggang Holdings prior to the establishment of ASARTR. In the study, researchers assessed community sentiments towards conservation and the possible establishment of a new protected area. The majority of respondents were in favour of conservation, mainly to protect the river which is a critical lifeline to the interior villages, but also because they saw the potential of the Tiger Reserve to bring attention to their remote and often overlooked villages. Tourism is generally perceived as having the ability to provide welcome stimulus to the local economy, even creating job opportunities which might encourage family members to return to live and work in their home villages.

Although, the upper Tembeling has been involved in small scale tourism activities for many years, the establishment of ASARTR in 2023 has generated considerable interest to visit the area. Local tour operators have seized upon this novelty, and the social media channels feeding iconic images of Hulu Tembeling have emerged and have thousands of followers. There has been a marked uptick in visitorship to this landscape particularly among domestic travellers and this number can only be expected to grow. Now that ASARTR is firmly established under the authority of Pahang State Parks Corp. (Perbadanan Taman Negeri Pahang) and managed with Enggang Management Services, the study provided an opportunity to more openly discuss the implications of the park's establishment and document local peoples' hopes and expectations to derive benefits from these changes.

This study is based on information gathered from public engagement during the project roll out in 2024, household surveys and Focus Group Discussions conducted during the Social Baseline Impact Assessment and Participatory Mapping sessions carried out in 2025. The tourism assets captured in this document were identified by community members in the participatory mapping exercises. Further field surveys and recces were carried out in April and June 2025 to explore some of the sites highlighted to us in these consultations. Further stakeholder consultations and training in CBT was carried out for Kg. Pagi with technical assistance from the Social Forestry team at FRIM (Forest Research Institute of Malaysia) which has helped forge new arrangements for community management of the tourism trail within Tembeling Forest Reserve.

How to use this report

Sections 2 and 3 provide an overview of the overall approach and information gathering process, Section 4 provides the main findings from the Assessment of Tourism Potential it highlights the unique tourism values of the Hulu Tembeling landscape that can be accessed from the different villages which includes areas within the ASARTR, Taman Negara NP, forest reserves, and state land. It briefly describes the activities and services currently offered. Drawing heavily on the participatory mapping exercise with the community, recreation, cultural and lifestyle activities that can be further developed for day trips and multi-day excursions are described in addition to seasonal festivals and communal activities.

Sections 5 provides the main direction for the Hulu Tembeling Sustainable Tourism Strategy on proposes a common vision for the landscape. It highlights governance and coordination needs and recommends short and medium term actions to enhance meaningful local participation in tourism working closely with EMS and PTNP. Travel to Hulu Tembeling river should contrast and complement what is currently offered at the Taman Negara National Park entrance at Kuala Tahan, providing a compelling reason for visitors to venture beyond Kuala Tahan for a different experience.

Hulu Tembeling villages can also leverage off their relevance as a gateway to the Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve and the role of the community in being part of the national mission to safeguard critical habitat for the Malayan tiger. A communication strategy for Hulu Tembeling is proposed in which the distinctive appeal of the respective villages is highlighted. A Strategy for sustainable tourism is also about attracting the right visitors to the area and dissuading others. For the moment, the Hulu Tembeling is ready to host visitors that are looking for authentic nature and cultural experiences and wanting to make genuine connections with local people. This market segment is likely to be most understanding and adaptable to basic accommodation and catering options, and most open and appreciative to what this landscape and community have to offer.

Section 6 provides Recommendations that can form an action plan for EMS and PTNP moving forward. It outlines steps to build a robust consultation and collaborative framework within individual villages, and across the Ulu Tembeling community to improve coordination and synergies for developing and promoting tourism. It also highlights improvements to infrastructure, amenities and to establish an effective waste management system to reduce environmental impact from the increase in visitors.

Consistent messaging and information on ASARTR for visitors should also include guidance on kampung etiquette and lowering environmental impact such as Hulu Tembeling **Leave No Trace** messaging. This section also highlights targeted capacity building in the area of hospitality, guiding, safety and boosting compliance and registration of accommodation with the key government agencies.

After the review by the community, the document should be presented to key local government agencies, particularly the District Office which has a vision for strengthening CBT in Jerantut. Sessions should also be held with Tourism Pahang and MOTAC Pahang to explore further support from government for infrastructure, training, and promotion.

A specific recommendation of this Strategy is the need to develop signature experiences and accommodation in each of the main five villages. This is to establish accommodation options that help generate revenue that can accrue to all households, including those that do not have the capacity or resources to develop tourism businesses and services. This could be part of a strategy to also build local capacity through full or part-time employment in managing lodges and campsites that adhere to best practices for sustainable tourism.

As ASARTR continues to become more firmly established and its planned Research and Conservation Centre is built in Hulu Tembeling, EMS/PTNP have a key role to play in enhancing the value proposition for venturing to this remote landscape. A Visitor Interpretation and Education Exhibition is planned within the Centre which would provide an additional attraction to help anchor tourism and provide a strong focus on building awareness of the biodiversity significance of this region and the role ASARTR plays in environmental protection, ecosystem services, and the provision of food and resources to the interior community.

Proposed ASARTR satellite information centres in key villages could also help facilitate promoting activities in appropriate areas and issuing permits for excursions into ASARTR and book visits to the ASARTR Research Centre. These village infocentres would be important for wayfinding and providing safety updates, while playing a supplementary role in nurturing visitor awareness of conservation and advocating protocols for lightening impact, protecting resources, and respecting local cultures.

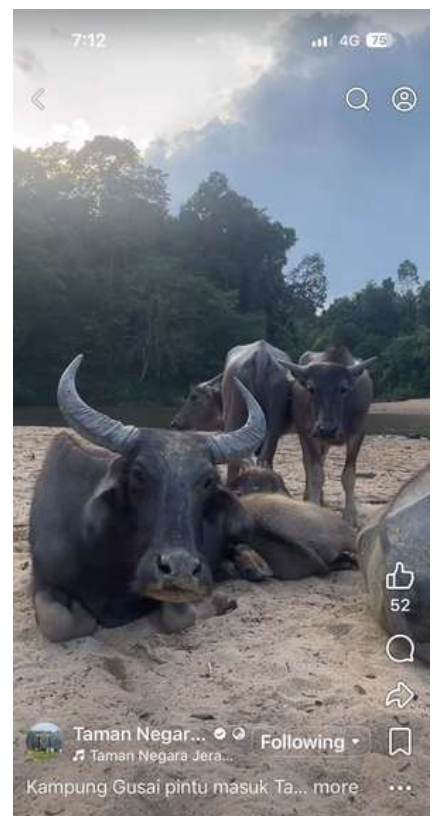
2 OVERVIEW



2 Overview

There are few places in Malaysia quite like the Hulu Tembeling region. Amidst the rainforest at the heart of the Peninsula, a unique way of life unfolds along along the river which sets the rhythm of day to day life. Here the river is wide, 30-50 metres in some places. With the exception of the monsoon when the rivers become swollen and impassable, most of the year the water is shallow and clear enough to glimpse schools of fish and colourful riverstones below. Riverine forest adorns the banks where primates and birds be sighted along boat journeys. In some villages such as Kuala Sat, a sandy beach has formed which becomes a social and recreation for locals and visitors alike.

The Tembeling river is the lifeline and connector here. People travel by boat from village to village, much as their ancestors have done for centuries. On these river, there is a sense that time has stood still, as you cruise pass forest and farms. Every so often, small herds of free ranging water buffalo may be seen lazing on the sandbanks or almost fully submerged in the heat of the day.



Travel to Hulu Tembeling is already actively promoted by the local community and tour operators who make quite effective use of social media, particularly Instagram and Tik Tok. Hulu Tembeling has entered the Malaysian public consciousness with iconic images above which helps to inspire visitors to venture beyond Taman Negara Kuala Tahan.

Source: Taman Negara Jeram Perahu (FB account)

This is place of peace and wide open spaces – local people are occupied with their agricultural activities (rubber tapping, bananas orchards and small farms) and fishing. Tourism is part of the local economy but does not overwhelm village life. The river and its banks exist as much for the enjoyment of locals as the occasional visitor. In many ways, Hulu Tembeling offers a refreshing and unforgettable experience of life in the interior of the Malayan Peninsula.

Box 1: History of human settlements in the Upper (Hulu) Tembeling Valley

Despite its remote location, the Upper Tembeling Valley has a long history of human settlement. Early groups such as the Palaeolithic Hoabinhians (between the 5th and 6th millennium B.C.), Neolithic people (from around 2,000 B.C.), Dong-s'on peoples from Vietnam, and the ancestors of the present-day Batek and Senoi used the valley as an inland trade and migration route connecting the northern and southern regions of the Malay Peninsula.

By the 10th century A.D., the valley also served as a main trade corridor linking northern kingdoms, such as Khmer and Ligor, with polities and settlements in the south. This movement was made possible by the extensive network of rivers, alongside several overland trails linking different river systems, which continues to influence the livelihoods of present-day Malay communities living in the valley.

More recently, the Tembeling Valley was gazetted as a Malay Reserve in 1923 under British colonial administration to secure the future of Malay communities in the area. The reserve stretches from Kampung Pagi in the west to the upper reaches of the Tembeling River in the east, which also overlaps with forest reserves gazetted in 1980 and consequently with the Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve, established in 2023.



Kg. Gusai is a scenic village that has been able to benefit from tourism, particularly those seeking the famous fishing spots such as Jeram Perahu Sungai Sepia.

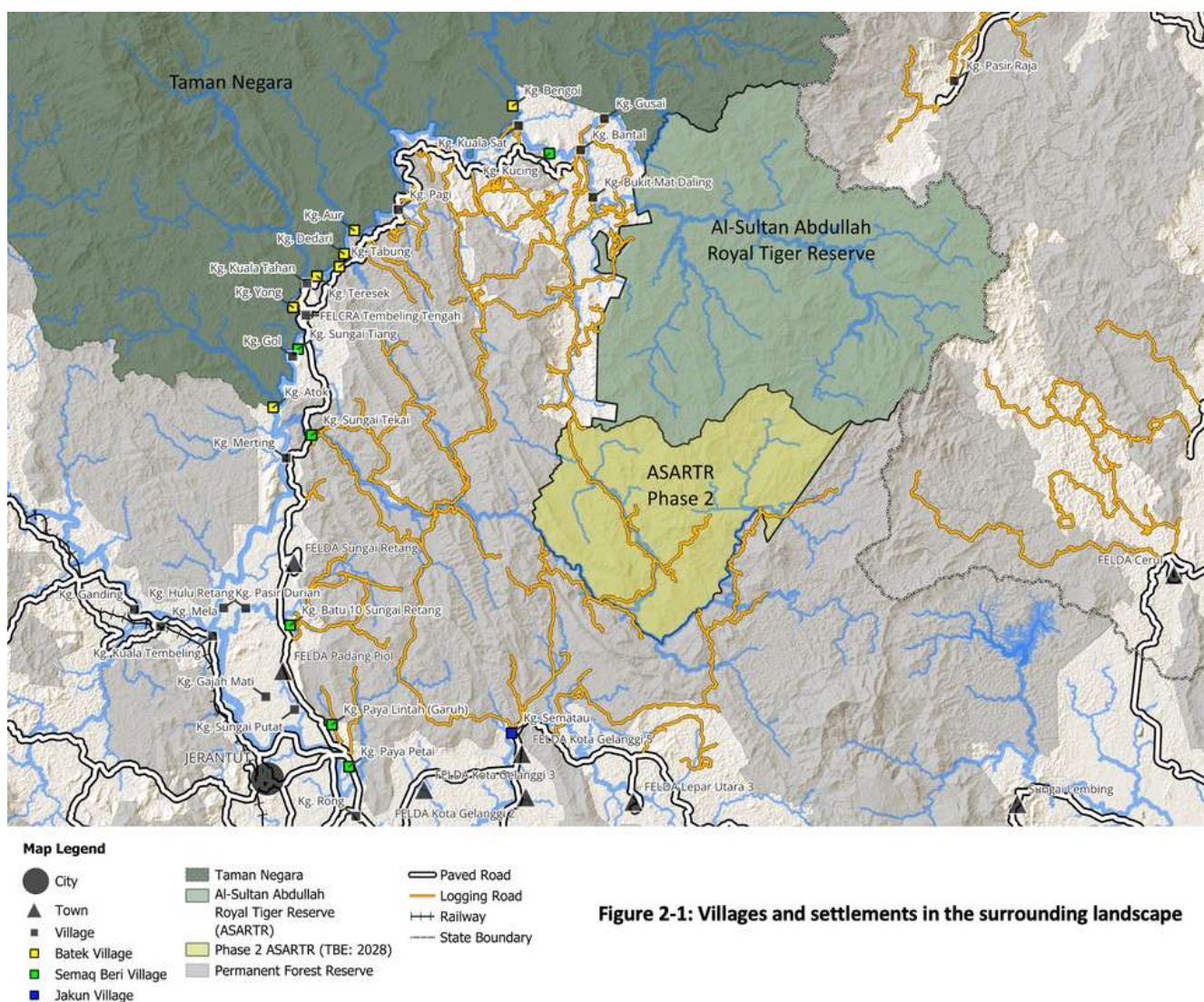


Figure 2-1: Villages and settlements in the surrounding landscape

Hulu Tembeling is uniquely nestled between Taman Negara NP and the Al-Sultan Royal Tiger Reserve. The village itself forms a valuable wildlife corridor and conservation landscape where it is possible to access a vibrant biodiversity rich setting while staying local homestays, chalets and campsites. Presently, this area attracts domestic tourists with occasional international visitors, mainly those that have added a visit to Hulu Tembeling to their travel to Kuala Tahan. However, as more people learn of travel to this area, both domestic and international visitors can be expected to increase.

As ASARTR becomes more firmly established, conservation and community-based tourism have the potential to be valuable drivers for socio-economic development. The addition of new tiers of accommodation and premium ecotourism experiences could stand to benefit the community through job creation, providing markets for local produce and products, and enabling a steady flow of income into the community in the non-monsoon season.

2.1 Hulu Tembeling and ecotourism

In Malaysia's National Ecotourism Plan (2016), Hulu Tembeling is mentioned in the context of one of 60 major ecotourism clusters. The Taman Negara-Jerantut-Lanchang-Bera is described as a swathe of Wild Malaysia for those seeking out nature and adventure. Taman Negara NP's Kuala Tahan entrance would be the centre. In 2024, Taman Negara NP received 135,435 registered visitors. In year's previous, visitorship is generally around the 80-100,000 mark. There are no reliable records for visitorship to Hulu Tembeling villages; a reasonable estimate is about 10 percent of the visitors to Taman Negara or 10,000 annually.

Historically, these villages would have only been accessible by boat. With the completion of the paved to Kg. Bantal in 2017, it is now possible for regular vehicles to reach villages like Kg. Kuala Sat and Kg. Gusai relatively easily. Beyond these, the road to Kg. Bantal, Kg. Gusai and Kg. Bukit Mat Daling would require 4WD access. Issues remain regarding the care and maintenance of these roads. Unrestricted use by heavy vehicles has caused severe impact and there are almost always the need for repairs to landslides and potholes. Local people believe that if their villages are more of a destination than an afterthought, the road would be well-maintained.

Box 2: Greater Taman Negara Ecotourism in the National Ecotourism Plan (2016)



Taman Negara Pahang is an iconic attraction with the unique selling proposition (USP) as one of the oldest rainforests in the world. Linking up Taman Negara with Kenong Rimba Park and Hulu Tembeling as a corridor will create a distinctive ecotourism destination in the Greater Taman Negara region. The combination of cave tourism in Kenong, riverine tourism/historical tourism in Hulu Tembeling and rainforest experiences in Taman Negara will enable this region to be a premium ecotourism destination.

[Excerpt from the 2023 *Multi-disciplinary Study for the Tekai Landscape* highlights the most compelling approach to translate the natural appeal of this landscape into a major tourism asset.]

2.2 Existing market segmentation

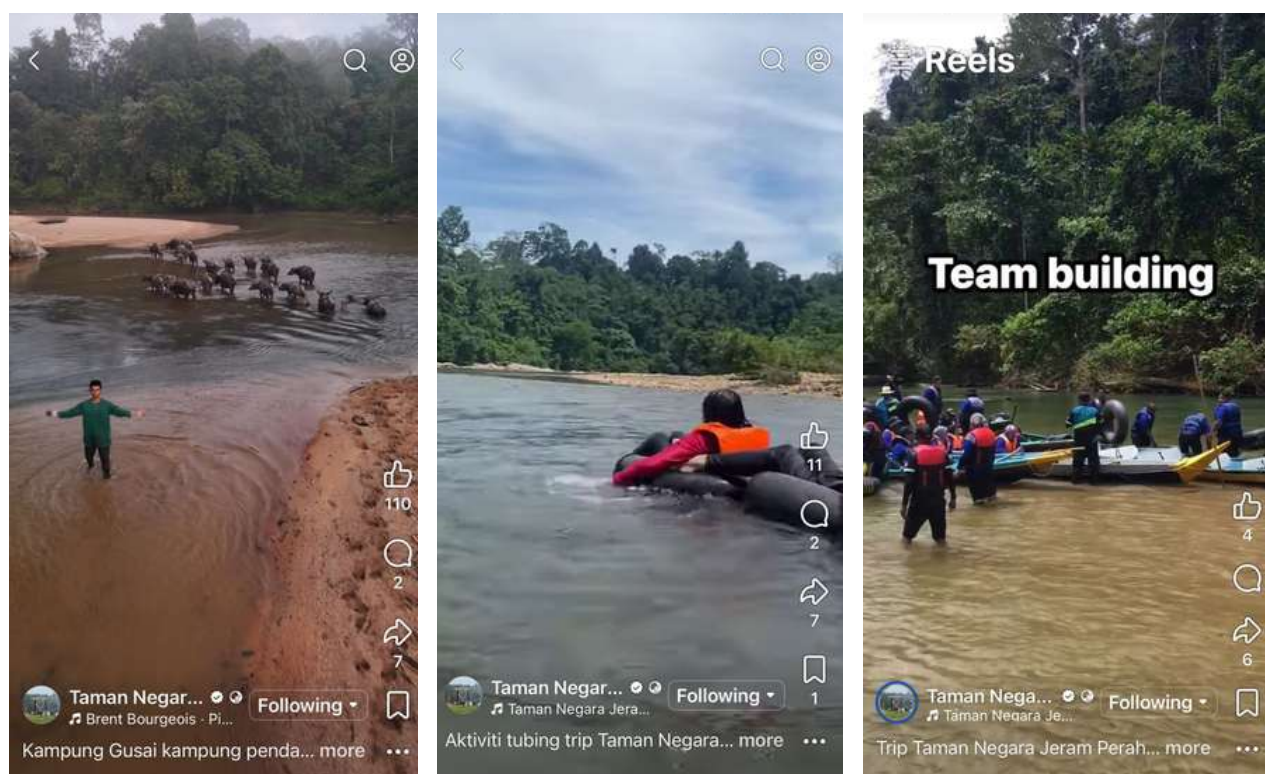
Based on the 2023 report, the tourism market segment is heavily skewed towards fishing excursions and team building activities. Smaller groups come for more targeted eco-adventures activities. About 10 percent of these visits are for special interest activities which might include birdwatching and other species focussed activities.

An approach to discussing for sustainable tourism in the Hulu Tembeling would be to ensure that the area continues to be popular with the domestic market, while expanding its ability to attract a premium international market that might have the ability to stay for longer periods, and to spend more on accommodation and excursions. Overall, there should be more holistic approach to giving visitors attractive reasons to extending their stay to visit several of the Hulu Tembeling villages, or consider making another visit to spend time in areas not yet explored.

Table 19: Existing market segments in Hulu Tembeling

	Fishing	Team Building	Eco-Adventure	Special Interest	Leisure
Market Size	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%
Sub Segment	• Angler groups	• School club • University Student Clubs	• Youth group / club • Student clubs • Leisure group	• Birders • Nature lovers	• Motorcycle groups • Families
Interest	• Fishing • Camping • Boating	• Training courses • Water sport • Trekking • Boating • Visit orang asli • Camping • Visit fish sanctuary (lampam)	• Trekking • Tubing • Kayaking • 4X4	• Birding • Fauna expedition	• Picnicking • Boating • Visit fish sanctuary • Family day

Source: Nature-based Solutions (2023) Multi-disciplinary Study for the Tekai Landscape: Initial Assessment Report. Confidential report prepared for HISH Holdings Sdn. Bhd.

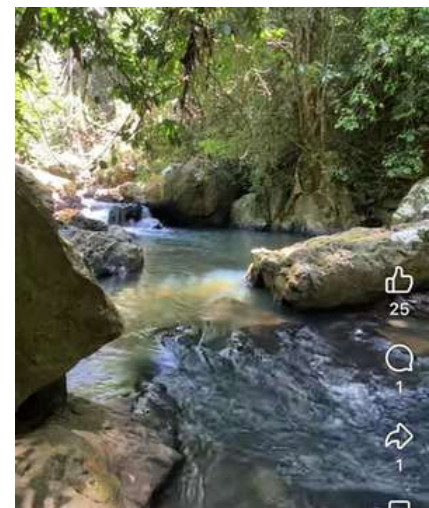
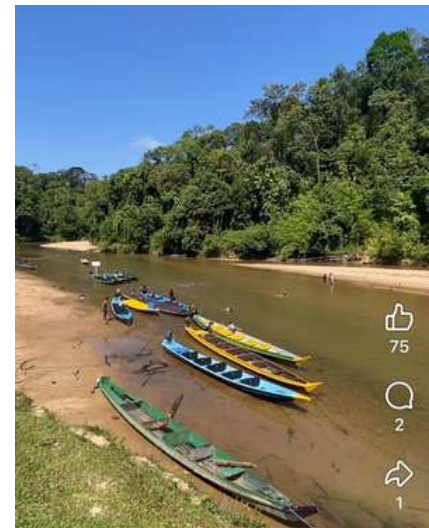


Family holidays, fishing experiences and team building activities focussed on river activities presently are the mainstay of tourism to Hulu Tembeling.

2.3 Sustainable tourism and sustaining a protected landscape

The 2023 Tourism study within the Tekai Landscape Assessment emphasised the role of well-managed tourism within the Hulu Tembeling landscape, both within ASARTR and the areas outside the park, as being important to the conservation goals of the region as a whole. Ensuring that the Tiger Reserve provides adequate opportunities for the local community is critical to ensuring the close alignment of local people with the activities within the protected landscape. Some of the strategies proposed below were discussed in more detail during village focus group sessions and updated recommendations are outlined in this Strategy document (see **Section 6**).

Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5
Positioning Gunung Ais State Park as a vibrant emerging eco-adventure tourism destination that complements Taman Negara	Increasing the breadth of the tourist offerings to cater for a wide spectrum of market segments while nurturing demand sophistication	Strengthening synergy between tourism and conservation by advocating regenerative forms of tourism that leverage of Green Recovery initiatives	Upscaling and upskilling local tourism manpower and entrepreneurship through capacity building and certification	Leveraging on the value proposition of the Park as the foundation for its product differentiation and branding



Hulu Tembeling offers a unique blend of wide open spaces, pristine forest and rivers and waterfalls, and the opportunity to experience the wild in the heart of the Peninsula. A strategy for Hulu Tembeling involves enhancing the current experience for all visitors, and adding another tier of market differentiation that would allow for premium offerings with higher visitor-spending based on comfort, experience curation, and service delivery.

2.4 Co-creating a vision for sustainable tourism

Although tourism can be a positive force for economic empowerment in under-served remote landscapes, we know that tourism is not benign and can also negatively impact the natural environment and disrupt social settings if not well managed. With this in mind, this Sustainable Tourism study was conducted to engage the community in envisaging a future with tourism that is aligned with local values and aspirations. In addition, the discussions also explored ways to strengthen local management of tourism enterprises, and enable equal access to opportunities and distribution of benefits.

In the context of this study, we adopted the criteria used by The Long Run for defining sustainable tourism. The Long Run is a global network for sustainable tourism and uses the 4Cs as its guiding principles. There is strong resonance with the priorities for tourism identified by the Hulu Tembeling community and their desire not to have local values and way of life be overwhelmed by visitors and outside influences. The ultimate objective is to ensure that visitor experiences are rewarding and authentic, celebrate and safeguard environmental and cultural heritage, while ensuring active participation and financially sustainable returns to the local community.

Box x: The Long Run's 4C approach to sustainable tourism			
The 4Cs is a framework that integrates sustainable and regenerative practices into any travel business. Designed by practitioners and experts, both proven and flexible, it makes strategic and holistic sustainability more accessible, breaking it down into four chunks:			
			
CONSERVATION • Biodiversity☒ • Climate action☒ • Environmental Management	COMMUNITY • Employee Well-Being ☒ • Ethical Employment☒ • Sustainable Development • Community Engagement	CULTURE • Cultural Diversity☒ • Heritage☒ • Ethical Exchange	COMMERCE • Responsible Business Practices • Long-Term Resilience ☒ • Funding Conservation • Community☒ • Culture Projects • Progression Planning
The 4Cs has helped many of the world's leading eco-lodges, travel businesses, and conservation projects to adopt holistic sustainability and a strategy for continuous improvement.			

The Strategy is mainly focussed on community-based tourism within the Hulu Tembeling villages located outside ASARTR. The main deliverable is a well-integrated vision for sustainable tourism within the Ulu Tembeling corridor as part of a regional development strategy to improve the socio-economic status of the community alongside the investment in the conservation functions of ASARTR.

The study also explores ways in which the community can have access to tourism sites within ASARTR in close cooperation with Perbadanan Taman Negeri Pahang (PTNP) and Enggang Management Services (EMS). This would be part of a long-term strategy to develop revenue streams for sustainably financing ASARTR's management. The Strategy explores possible synergies between the planned ASARTR Research Centre close to Kg. Bukit Mat Daling and community-managed homestays and lodges. The planned facility would elevate the visitor experience by infusing travel to Hulu Tembeling with the message of ASARTR's role in rainforest conservation and the ongoing mission to save the Malayan tiger.



Some of the project team setting off to set up camp for the Scientific Expedition conducted in ASARTR in 2025.



3 PROCESS



3. Process

This section outlines the process and approach used to develop the sustainable tourism strategy for Hulu Tembeling. In contrast to conventional consultancies, THF accompanied the project team throughout the project commencing from the earliest engagement with the community in the form of the project roll-out. We introduced ourselves as part of the project implementation team led by EMS and PTNP along with NbS, THF, BORA and Panthera. This was immediately followed by household surveys to collect quantitative data and interview feedback from household heads from the main villages. For the Orang Asli villages, a qualitative approach was adapted for in-person interviews. The Social Baseline Impact Assessment (SBIA) that followed, enabled the THF team to obtain inputs from the community that were directly related to tourism.

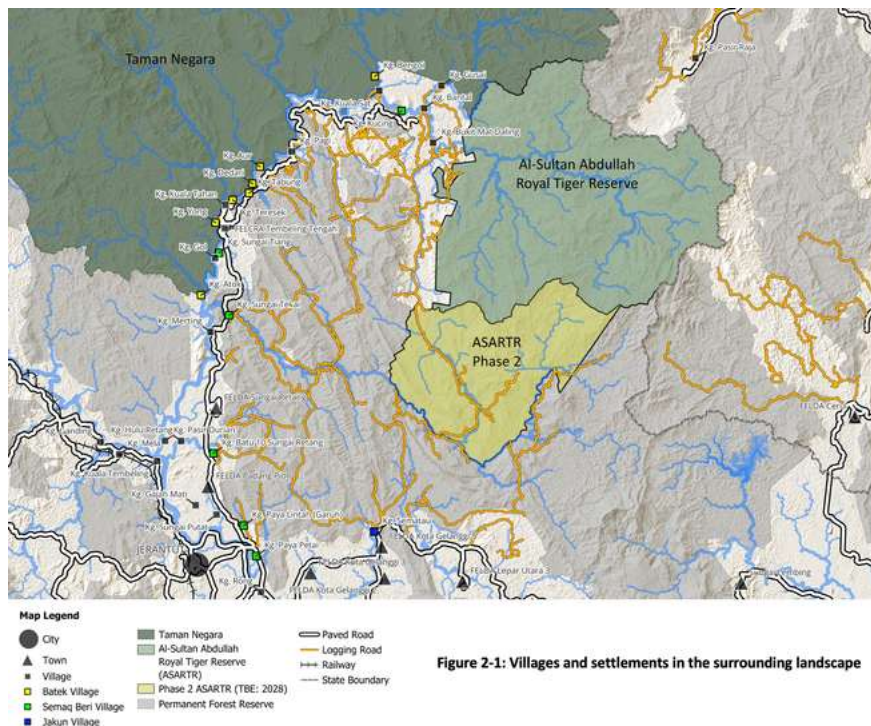


Figure 2-1: Villages and settlements in the surrounding landscape

A component of the participatory mapping session included the identification of tourism assets and opportunities.

Field surveys were conducted thereafter by the THF/EMS team to assess selected sites that had not previously been visited. The result of these consultations are presented in Section 4: The Assessment of Tourism Potential.

Map of the seven main Hulu Tembeling villages and surrounding protected areas (Taman Negara Pahang, Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve).



The sustainable tourism study was informed by a range of formal and informal discussions as well as field visits. In addition, the local tourism coordinator supported by the EU grant helped to sustain meaningful participation throughout the project and assured the quality of the engagement.

The Hulu Tembeling villages at a Glance. Overall the population is small with an estimated 2,300 individuals from 544 households among the Malay villages and 337 Orang Asli from 92 households in two villages based on the 2023 Tekal Landscape study.

Table 10: Malay villages covered in this Study

Village	Mukim	No. of households	Population (persons)	Average no. of persons per household
Kampung Kuala Tahan	Tembeling	89	409	4.60
Kampung Kuala Sat	Hulu Tembeling	130	600	6.74
Kampung Pagi	Hulu Tembeling	77	370	4.16
Kampung Bantal	Hulu Tembeling	137	504	5.66
Kampung Bukit Mat Daling	Hulu Tembeling	132	560	6.29
Kampung Gusai	Hulu Tembeling	68	262	2.94

Table 14: Semaq Beri villages in the Study area

No.	Village	No. of Households	No. of People	GPS Coordinates	Headman
1	Kg. Sg. Tiang	60	100	4.322768, 102.393571	Roslan (Batin)
2	Kg. Sg. Tekai	80	300+	4.246826, 102.406634	Wan a/l Mareh (Batin)
3	Kg. Batu 10 Sg. Retang	85	200	4.075684, 102.387275	
4	Kg Paya Lintah (Garuh)	43	180	3.976083, 102.432386	Man (Batin)
5	Kg. Paya Lintah	n/a	n/a	3.747767, 102.437748	Razlan (Batin)
6	Kg. Kucing	65	212	4.5015910, 102.6160080	Cis/Aziz (Batin)

Table 15: Batek villages in the Study area

No.	Village	No. of Households	No. of people	GPS Coordinates	Headman
1	Kg. Atok	26	121	4.2680550, 102.3719060	Tengalan (Hussin) (Batin)
2	Kg. Yong	15	85	4.3615056, 102.3923418	Azwan (wakil)
3	Kg. Teresek	5	33	4.3910814, 102.4129770	Salim (rep)
4	Kg. Tabung	14	61	4.3904870, 102.4171431	Mail (rep)
5	Kg. Dedari	No info	No info	4.395870, 102.432660	No info
6	Kg. Mar	10	50	4.285870, 102.410000	Mendera (wakil)
7	Kg. Bengoi	27	125	4.5404917, 102.5844872	Rahim (Sorja)
8	Kg. Kuching	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
9	Cangkong				

Source: Nature-based Solutions (2023) Multi-disciplinary Study for the Tekai Landscape: Initial Assessment Report. Confidential report prepared for HISH Holdings Sdn. Bhd.

Household surveys		
Date conducted	Village	No. of participants
1-4 Aug 2024	Kg. Gusai	33
19-22 Aug 2024	Kg. Pagi	36
8-11 Sept 2024	Kg. Mat Daling	59
12-15 Sept 2024	Kg. Bantal	55
16-21 Sept 2024	Kg. Kuala Sat	38
27 Nov – 3 Dec 2024	Kg. Bengoi and Kg. Kuching	32
Community workshops		
23 Feb 2025	Kg. Kuala Sat	22
24 Feb 2025	Kg. Bantal	24
25 Feb 2025	Kg. Mat Daling	31
26 Feb 2025	Kg. Gusai	25
19 June 2025	Kg. Kucing	30
20 June 2025	Kg. Bengoi	30

Details of the 2024 household surveys and 2025 Social Baseline Impact Assessment (SBIA) conducted by combined teams comprising NbS, Panthera, THF, and PTNP.

Based on the above table, during the Household Surveys the percentage of households surveyed was estimated as follows: Kg. Gusai 33/68 (48.5), Kg. Pagi 36/77 (46.7%), Kg. Mat Daling 59/132 (44.7%), Kg. Bantal 55/137 (40%), Kg. Kuala Sat 38/130 (29%), and Kg. Bengoi/Kg. Kuching 32/92 (35%) suggesting that the inputs were obtained from a broadly representative sample of the community.

3.1 Project roll out with EMS/PTNP

The study commenced with the official Project Roll-out alongside the other project partners supporting EMS and PTNP in delivering the EU project. The roll out was held in July 2026 and comprised formal presentations to the village. Thereafter, a social team under THF/EMS proceeded with conducting household surveys to assess a socio-economic profile of the Ulu Tembeling villages and to better understand local use of natural resources and the extent to which tourism and tourism-related activities contribute to the income of individual households at the time of the survey.

Information gathered included a population profile, income, education, health, financial security) and eligibility for government aid and subsidies. The surveys also assessed the extent to which local people understood what ASARTR was and how they believed the reserve's establishment would affect their lives.

The surveys provided a frame for the team to develop a rapport with the local community and discuss local development challenges at the household and village level, and local aspirations to improve their socio-economic status including the creation of employment or business opportunities. During this initial engagement with the community, the team focussed on issues raised by them. Care was taken not to put too much emphasis on tourism as a solution or to raise expectations to what the project would deliver.



Household surveys were conducted in a variety of locations - at individual houses, at village coffee shops, and in public areas.

3.2 Focus Group Discussions and SBIA

Focus Group Discussions coordinated by Nature-based Solutions as part of the SBIA (Social Baseline Impact Assessment) exercise in February 2025 included sessions for the THF/ EMS team to gather information and perspectives on tourism. We conducted a Participatory Mapping exercise which enabled the community a framework to identify the tourism assets and values in the vicinity of their village. The discussion also provided them an opportunity to share some of special places and activities in the vicinity of their village.

Information collected during the FGDs

- Historical sites
- Popular fishing sites and rivers
- Foraging activities
- Areas for hiking and waterfalls
- Special communal activities and celebrations
- Signature events
- Needs and challenges faced in developing tourism

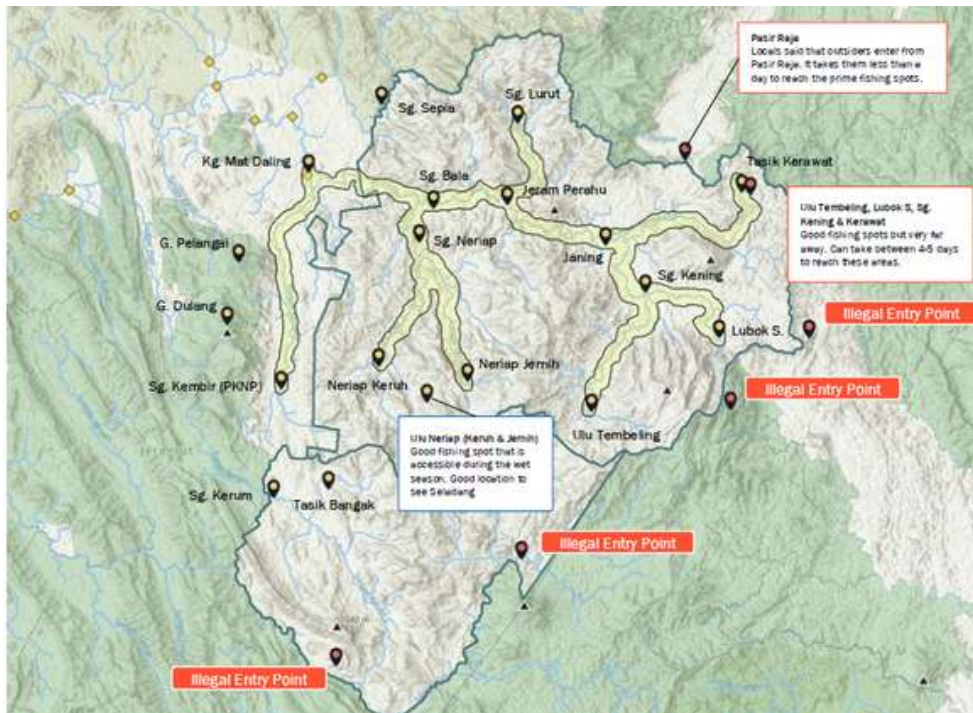
The participants for the Community Workshops were selected from the Household Surveys. They included:

- Boatmen/fishermen
- Tourism operators
- Orchard / plantation / livestock owners
- Non-Timber Forest Product collectors
- Women's group

For each of the Malay villages, there were three main discussion groups, the women's group, young men (those under 55, and older men those over 55).



In addition to obtaining a better sense of resource use among the respective villages, the sessions provided the opportunity to discuss issues in greater detail.



The resulting maps provide a much more nuanced overview of how the respective villages use the river, where they access resources, and which areas are used for tourism.



3.3 Field surveys

Field surveys were conducted by the THF/EMS team between 16 - 25 April 2025 and 18-20 May 2025. Visits were conducted to Kg. Pagi, Kg. Bantal, Kg. Gusai, Kg. Kuala Sat, and Kg. Bukit Mat Daling. At each village, the local community were invited to show us some of the specific locations highlighted as having potential for tourism during the earlier mapping exercise. In addition, the team took the opportunity to explore the potential to develop new products such as night spotting activities. As the surveys were conducted during the post Hari Raya period, there was an opportunity to participate in the local celebrations and cultural events.

Sites visited during the surveys included:

- Jeram Perahu Sepia at Kg Gusai
- Lata Layang-layang at Kg Pagi
- Jungle trekking in Taman Negara NP at Kg Kuala Sat
- Tasik Jemual at Kg Bantal
- Night walk/trekking at Kg Kuala Sat and Kg Pagi

These activities provided some insights on sites with tourism potential and how they could form the basis of a sustainable tourism strategy.



4 ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL



4. Assessment of Tourism Potential

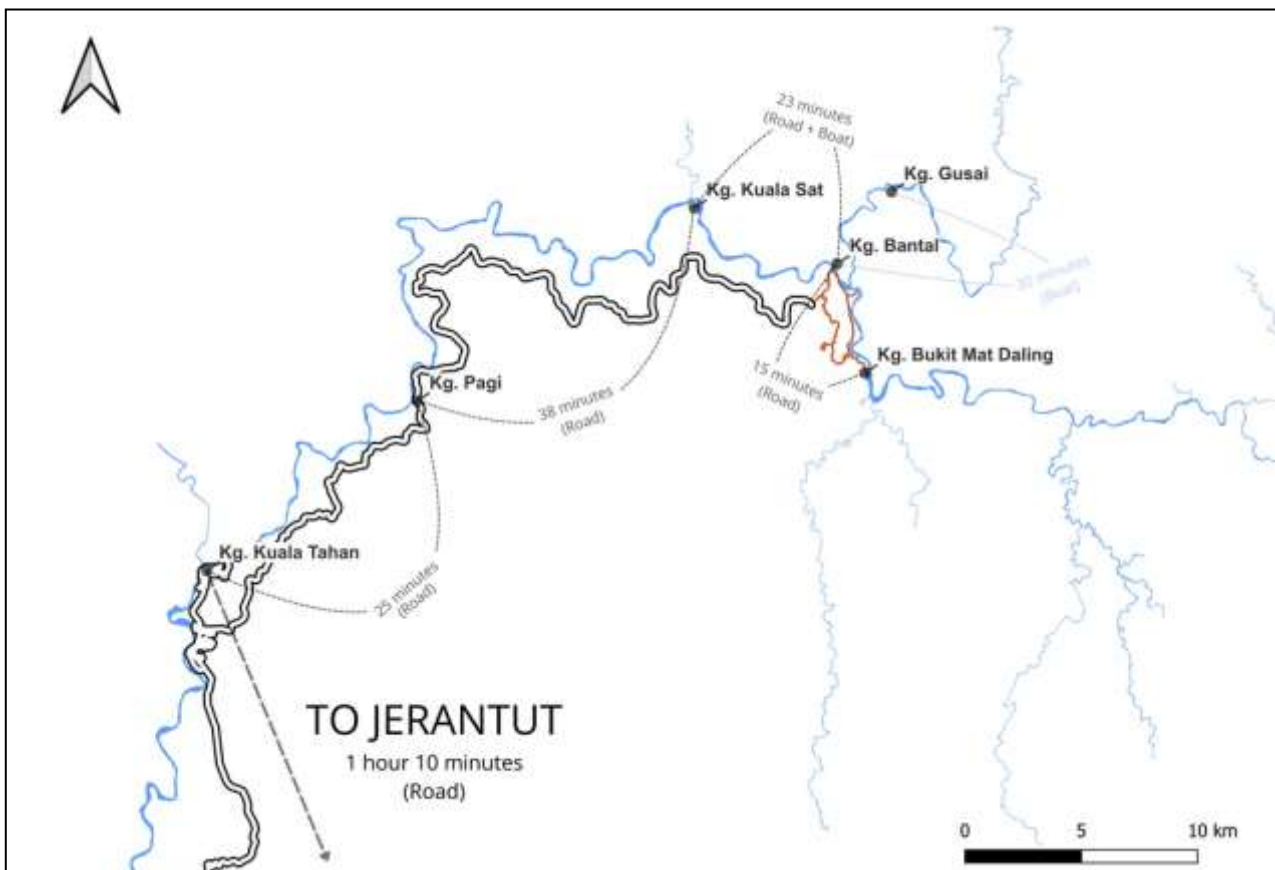
Despite being situated adjacent to Taman Negara Pahang, Hulu Tembeling does not receive the same magnitude of domestic and international tourism as the neighbouring Kampung Kuala Tahan, which remains the principal gateway to the national park. This is changing, however, with the establishment of the Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve, which has piqued public interest in this previously little-known area in the interior of the Malayan Peninsula. Hulu Tembeling is gaining a substantial following on TikTok and Instagram and is beginning to attract a stream of visitors drawn to its affordable, off-the-beaten-track adventures, amid the hospitality of the traditional village setting.

Presently, visitors to Hulu Tembeling can expect to stay in rustic, village-style accommodations such as homestays, chalets, and dormitories. Small family-operated eateries with flexible operating schedules provide local cuisine with freshly caught or harvested produce. A network of boat jetties function as vital inter-village transport nodes, providing a distinctive river-based way of appreciating the local settlements. Tourism offerings across the villages are broadly similar, with a strong emphasis on outdoor recreation such as hiking, river activities, and waterfalls. Fishing remains a key attraction for domestic visitors. Cultural experiences, particularly demonstrations and bushcraft workshops within Orang Asli settlements, tend to appeal more to international visitors, though they are currently offered on a smaller scale.

This section outlines the tourism assets and resources currently in use, identifies untapped opportunities, and highlights challenges to their sustainable realisation across the five principal Malay villages of Hulu Tembeling. For this report, notable tourism assets within Orang Asli settlements are considered in relation to nearby villages. The descriptions presented here are informed by direct field observations, focus group discussions with local stakeholders, and a review of relevant literature and media sources. It is by no means exhaustive. There are likely to be additional areas of interest to highlight in the future, but we have focussed on the most immediate opportunities so that these might be realised for optimum benefits to the community within the shortest time frame.

*Image on previous page
Trip recce to Lata Layang
Layang with the Kg. Pagi
community*

With a focus on community-based tourism, the assessment centred on collaboration with local villagers to identify and map tourism assets and resources across five Malay villages; Kampung Pagi, Kampung Bantal, Kampung Kuala Sat, Kampung Gusai, and Kampung Bukit Mat Daling, as well as two Orang Asli settlements along the Tembeling River. Since the completion of the Kuala Tahan–Mat Daling Road in 2017, many of these areas have become more accessible by car. Motorised boats continue to play a critical role in regional connectivity, as the paved road currently extends only as far as Kampung Bantal, leaving several villages and key tourism sites accessible solely via the river.



Map of travel times between the main Hulu Tembeling villages.

4.1 Kampung Pagi

Located along the Kuala Tahan–Mat Daling Road, Kampung Pagi is the first village encountered after Kampung Kuala Tahan when travelling from the nearest major town, Jerantut. Owing to its position, it often serves as an entry point for visitors to Hulu Tembeling. Despite its relative accessibility to Kuala Tahan, Kampung Pagi currently receives less attention than several other villages in the region.



Map of highlighted tourism assets and activities around Kampung Pagi.

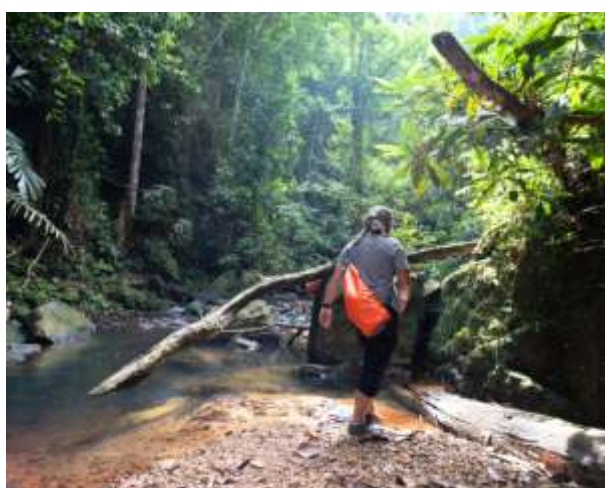
The village's strongest tourism assets lie in its scenic landscapes and natural surroundings. Prominent sites such as Gunung Dulang and Lata Layang-Layang were once popular with hikers, but visitor numbers have declined markedly in recent years due to challenges in obtaining permits from the local Forestry Department.

Beyond its natural attractions, Kampung Pagi is characterised by a vibrant, multigenerational community that is welcoming to visitors and actively engages in cultural performances. These include silat demonstrations, displays of traditional fishing methods, and traditional drumming (bergendang) for guests.

The village's strongest tourism assets lie in its scenic landscapes and natural surroundings. Prominent sites such as Gunung Dulang and Lata Layang-Layang were once popular with hikers, but visitor numbers have declined markedly in recent years due to challenges in obtaining permits from the local Forestry Department.

4.1.1 Lata Layang-Layang

Lata Layang-Layang is regarded as one of the region's most striking natural features. The waterfall flows gracefully over a series of rock ledges, forming cascading steps that reflect the gradual sculpting power of water over time.



Highlights of the hike to Lata Layang-Layang

(Photo Credits: (L) Zikry Adib Kurnia / THF; © Adrian Cheah / Panthera Malaysia)

The surrounding rock formations are particularly eye-catching, appearing as if layers of stone have been carefully stacked upon one another. This natural arrangement gives the site an almost surreal quality, as though shaped by design rather than erosion. Downstream, the river narrows into a canyon-like passage flanked by steep rock walls, hinting at a long history of water carving its way through resistant stone.

Reaching the waterfall involves a 7 km round-trip trek through relatively flat terrain, interspersed with multiple river crossings. One stretch requires hikers to wade through a rocky riverbed, offering an up-close experience of the area's freshwater ecosystem. For most Malaysians with a reasonable level of fitness, the journey is considered easy to moderately challenging.

Lata Layang-layang - summary

Planning a visit	Suitable for daytrips which involve a four-wheel drive to the beginning of the trail, followed by a 4 – 5 hour trek. 2D/1N or 3D/2N are also possible, as there are rudimentary campsites available.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders:	Pahang Forestry Department - Forest Reserve. Tour Operators.
Status & Challenges:	Used to be a popular spot for local and foreign tourists but is rarely visited nowadays due to difficulties in obtaining permits from the local forestry department, as the waterfall is located within a forest reserve. While the trail is sufficiently defined, support infrastructures along parts of the trail are either non-existent or are weathered and old. Improving support infrastructure such as ropes could prevent and reduce injury cases along the trail.
Untapped Potential	The area presents an opportunity to tap into the niche but highly lucrative wildlife watching market (birdwatching, herping) due to: Dense riverine vegetation adjacent to healthy rainforest, alluding to a rich abundance of herpetofauna life. Sought-after birds, such as paradise flycatchers and hornbills that were detected along the trail.

4.1.2 Gunung Dulang

Rising to about 877 metres above sea level, Gunung Dulang features distinctive mossy patches and unique sub-montane vegetation that hint at the transition towards montane forest. Hikers are rewarded with panoramic views of neighbouring sharp-edged peaks that punctuate the landscape from its summit. On certain days, rolling carpets of clouds drift across the valleys and peaks, which enhance the mountain's scenic appeal. The hike is considered challenging for most adults due to its unforgiving terrain.



Misty morning at 877 metres above sea level on Gunung Dulang

(Photo Credits: Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir)

Gunung Dulang - assessment summary

Planning a visit	A four-wheel drive is required to access the starting point. The hike is ideally completed as a 2D/1N or 3D/2N camping trip due to the duration of the hike.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	Pahang Forestry Department - Forest Reserve. Tour Operators.
Status & Challenges	Popular with local villagers and domestic angling communities.
Untapped Potential	High potential for revival for the domestic market and tapping into the adventure tourism market for international visitors.

4.1.3 Fishing tourism at Kg. Pagi

Kampung Pagi is well known for its fishing sites among villagers in Hulu Tembeling and the domestic angling community. These sites can be broadly categorised based on permitting requirements, namely those within Taman Negara and those within local village areas. Sites within the village areas generally require shorter travel times by boat compared to those in Taman Negara. Taman Negara sites include Lubuk Rincing (approximately 1 hour by boat), Lata Said (2 to 2.5 hours), Lubuk Rawa (over 1 hour), and Kuala Perkai (less than 1 hour). Local village sites include Lubuk Lenting (30 minutes), Kuala Keniam (30 minutes), Lubuk Lompat (25 minutes), and Sungai Tembeling, which is located adjacent to Kampung Pagi.



Fishing sites that can be found around Kampung Pagi

(Photo Credits: Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir)

Kg. Pagi fishing trips - summary

Planning a visit	Fishing activities can be done as a part of a day trip or a 2D/1N camping activity.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN). • Local Tourism Operators.
Status & Challenges	The site was once popular among local hikers, but permits are no longer issued by the local Forestry Department.
Untapped Potential	Periodic restrictions and regulations on fishing activities may be necessary to safeguard fish stocks and ensure the long-term sustainability of the activity.

4.1.4 Bukit Awan Viewpoint

Bukit Awan serves as a rest stop along the Kuala Tahan–Mat Daling Road, located between Kampung Pagi and Kampung Kuala Sat. The site is equipped with a car park, several small rest huts, and a viewing deck offering sweeping views over the Tembeling Valley, where the Tembeling River winds through the forested landscape. True to its name, the “Hill of Clouds,” the vista is at times shrouded in mist during the early morning, creating an atmospheric scene in place of the view.



Views from Bukit Awan viewpoint during different weather conditions
(**Photo Credit:** Zikry Adib Kurnia)

Bukit Awan Viewpoint summary

Planning a visit	A stopover on the way between villages. This spot could also serve as a morning or evening picnic venue.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Public Works Department of Malaysia (JKR). • Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Pagi.
Status & Challenges	• Popular with local tourists and part of the nightspotting tour • Lack of interpretation and basic facilities such as toilets. Is not manned and is therefore vulnerable to vandalism and littering.
Untapped Potential	Bukit Awan Viewpoint could play an important role in visitor education and orientation to boost the branding of Hulu Tembeling tourism and also expand on the conservation significance of this landscape, Taman Negara NP and ASARTR.

4.1.5 Nighttime Wildlife Spotting at Taman Negara, Kg. Pagi

Parts of Kampung Pagi share a boundary with the wildlife-rich Taman Negara Pahang, separated in places by rivers. This setting presents a unique opportunity to develop guided night trails, offering adventure-oriented visitors the chance to experience nocturnal wildlife in its natural habitat. Unlike daytime excursions, nighttime wildlife spotting offers visitors a more intimate and up-close encounter with wildlife and greater opportunities for mobile photography, creating lasting memories. The sustainability of this activity and the welfare of the wildlife involved must be safeguarded via proper training and monitoring of the tourism operators conducting such activities.

Initial surveys conducted by local guides and THF staff to develop such a trail revealed a diversity of reptile and amphibian species, including the Oriental Rat Snake, Blue-eyed Anglehead Lizard, and the Slashed-backed Frog. An extensive salt-lick pond was also identified, presenting an excellent opportunity for tourism-focused camera trapping to detect ungulates and other large mammals that utilise the site. Its proximity to Taman Negara Pahang offers an exciting opportunity for the Kampung Pagi community to tap into the growing market for naturalist and citizen science experiences.



Several wildlife found during a nightwalk in Taman Negara near Kampung Pagi (Photo Credits: Zikry Adib Kurnia)



Nightwalk activities

(Photo Credits: (L) Imran Muniem Norazrin; (Right) Zikry Adib Kurnia.

Activity options	Nighttime wildlife spotting is ideally limited to one or two nights for general adventure-oriented tourists. For specialist visitors focused on particular species, extended stays may be warranted, depending on the rarity and detectability of the target wildlife.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN). • Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Pagi. • Local tourism operators.
Opportunity/ access and management recommendations	• Community-led permitting to facilitate easier tourist access into Taman Negara should be discussed and coordinated with PERHILITAN. • The development and improvement of trails for wildlife spotting must be done, prioritising ecological sensitivity with active involvement from PERHILITAN. • Support in terms of obtaining Green Badge Nature Guide licences for local guides may need to be arranged, as the activity revolves around wildlife in a protected area. • Subsequently, a Continuous Tourism Related Education (CTRE) session involving leading players in the growing nighttime wildlife spotting industry could be beneficial to enhance the capacity of local tourism players (e.g. herping, nocturnal mammals, mobile photography etc.)

4.1.6 Cultural performances at Kg. Pagi

Kampung Pagi is blessed with a vibrant community that is eager to showcase their cultural heritage in various aspects and forms. Traditional ways of life are still being practised and these are most visible during festivities. Interesting potential culture-based tourism products in Kampung Pagi include martial arts demonstrations (Silat), traditional drum playing (bergendang), top playing (gasing), traditional fishing methods (Mengerau/mengendap), and the making of traditional food products Asam Rong (a sour condiment made from rubber tree seeds) and Sambal Hitam (sambal made from belimbing). These activities are already utilised as tourism products to varying degrees. For example, during the Taman Negara Rakit Race, tourists are able to watch and participate in raft races.

These cultural activities and demonstrations are done during local celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr, community sporting days, or during high-profile visits. With a wealth of cultural heritage, Kampung Pagi can be supported to keep traditions alive through programmes to ensure they are transmitted to the younger generation and that they continue to occupy a place in village life.



Popular cultural demonstrations at Kampung Pagi

(Photo Credits: Top - Bergendang by Zikry Adib Kurnia; Bottom - Gasing playing and Silat by Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Activity options	In addition to offering these demonstrations and activities on demand, local village authorities could organise a weekly or monthly performance night for both the community and visiting tourists. This could serve as a shared third space while enhancing the village's tourism appeal and overall charm.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Tourism Pahang. • Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Pagi.
Opportunity for development	• Develop a calendar which contains dates of key celebrations and festivities where cultural demonstrations and activities will be featured. • Key celebrations could be advertised and highlighted with the help of Tourism Pahang. • Develop regular performance nights with JPKK Kampung Pagi and in collaboration with Kuala Tahan community to enhance visibility of local culture in the main visitor hub.

Facilities/Amenities:	Remarks:
Accommodations	Cabin or village-style accommodations are popular, with some campsites and Rumah Rakit for fishing trips. Chalets managed by JPKK have been recently refurbished with assistance from MOTAC Pahang.
Restaurants/Groceries	Restaurants or 'warungs' in Kampung Pagi are limited. However, several grocery stores selling basic items are available.
Tourism Centre	A small building is available with very basic information. Interpretation is limited.
Jetty	Basic jetty available.
Community Areas	The local mosque, Masjid An Nur and occasionally the local school, Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Pagi are used for community gatherings during festivities.

4.2 Kampung Kuala Sat

Settlements in Kampung Kuala Sat are concentrated at the confluence of the Sat River and a wider stretch of the Tembeling River. Historically, settlements were located further upstream along the Sat River, but recurrent and intensifying flood events have prompted most residents to relocate closer to the confluence. This longstanding relationship with the Sat River has shaped the village's development and contributed significantly to its prominence in ecotourism, establishing it as one of the most popular destinations in Hulu Tembeling. This is also due in part to the establishment of a Village Cooperative focussed on tourism which has had support and guidance from a FRIM project. They have an office and information centre in the centre of the village.

Kampung Kuala Sat is particularly appealing to international visitors for its combination of river-based recreation and cultural immersion. The Sat River's narrow and gently flowing character makes it well suited for slow-paced water activities such as kayaking and tubing. Further upstream lies Kampung Bengoi, an indigenous Batek settlement that adds a cultural dimension to river-based excursions. Many Local community-based tour operators often arrange visits to the settlement, offering tourists opportunities to engage with the Batek community.

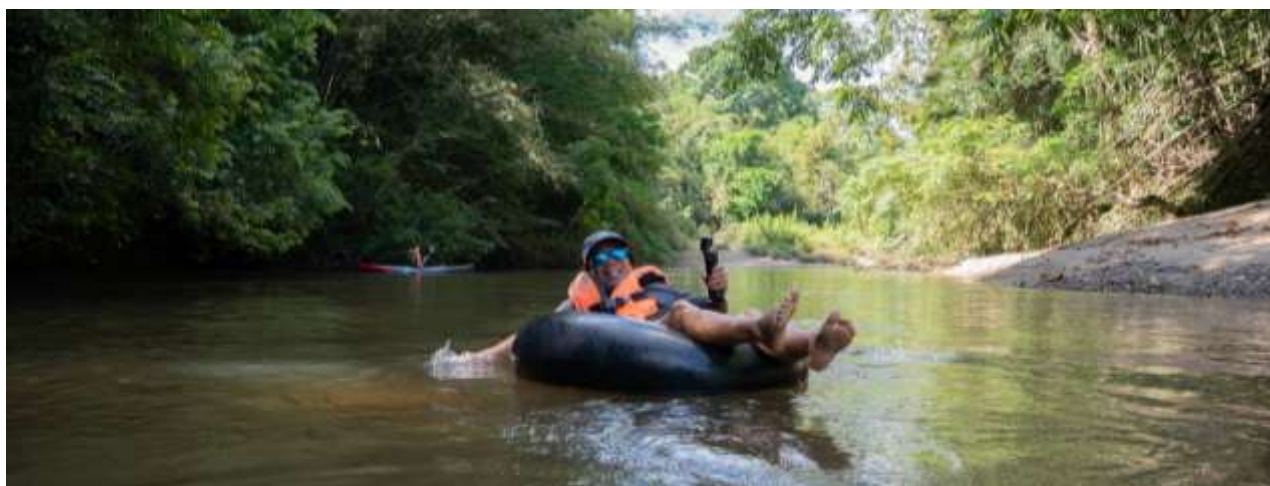
Residents of Kampung Kuala Sat are directly or indirectly involved in community-based ecotourism, serving as trekking guides, facilitators of water-based activities, and boat operators for visitors. The village is also regionally recognised for its excellence in this field. In January 2025, "Kuala Sat Community Based Tourism," representing Kampung Kuala Sat, received the ASEAN Tourism Standard Award 2025 to 2027 for Community-Based Tourism.



Map of highlighted tourism assets and activities around Kampung Kuala Sat.

4.2.1 Recreational activities along the Sat River

Water-based recreational activities along the Sat River represent one of the primary factors motivating tourist visits to Kampung Kuala Sat. The river's gently flowing current is well-suited to tubing and kayaking, while the extensive sandbanks serve as natural rest areas, thereby enhancing both the safety and comfort of participants. Operators will also often monitor tourists by moving from sandbank to sandbank by boat. At times, the experience is enhanced by the presence of wildlife utilising the river as a key resource. Nesting Black-and-red Broadbills can often be seen along the river, hornbills are seen flying across the river, and the Malaysian Blue Flycatchers darting from bush to bush.



Water-based activities along the Sat River

(Photo Credits: Top Right - Ahmad Amir Others - Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Activity options	Water-based recreational activities are normally done alongside visits to Kampung Bengoi, the indigenous Batek village and other community-based activities.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Local tourism operators/cooperatives. • Permit to enter Taman Negara from Perhilitan
Opportunities to enhance experience	Although the local guides excel in providing engaging activities and ensuring visitor safety, they could further enhance their impact by strengthening their storytelling skills, particularly in conveying the biodiversity and cultural narratives of the river. Such improvements would further strengthen sustainable tourism in the area.

4.2.2 Kuala Sat Fish Sanctuary

This community-managed fish sanctuary was established as part of the myKomuniti Perikanan (myKP) programme by the Department of Fisheries. The sanctuary is supported by a floating hut with openings on the floor to provide a view of fish below the sanctuary. Regular feeding is done as part of the tourism experience and to maintain the presence of riverine fish species such as kelah, lampam, and kerai around the sanctuary. Besides the no-fishing rule around the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary, no other conservation actions or interventions are done to promote the conservation of fish stock in the area.



Fish feeding activity at Kuala Sat Fish Sanctuary (Photo Credits: Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Activity options	The area is usually visited as a short stop after spending time along the Sat River. There is a small charge for fish feeding and for boat transfer from the main river shore.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Department of Fisheries Malaysia. • Locals manning the Fish Sanctuary. • Local tour operators/cooperatives.
Opportunity for development	The incorporation of conservation activities could increase the value of the fish sanctuary as a community-based ecotourism spot. Larger no-fishing zones throughout important areas along the Sat River would help maintain the fish population.

4.2.3 Traditional foraging experience

Several tour operators offer a foraging experience alongside recreational water-based activities along the Sat River. Traditionally, foraging for forest vegetables such as the shoots of wild ferns (usually *Diplazium esculentum*), and mud snails (usually *Cerithidea obtusa*) is done communally by inland Malay communities as they are central ingredients traditional dishes in the region. This provides another opportunity to share local culture with visitors.



Foraging for snails and ferns along the Sat River (**Photo Credits:** Left - Zikry Adib Kurnia; Right: Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Activity options	Foraging activities and culinary experiences are often done alongside water-based activities along the Sat River.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Local tourism operators/cooperatives.
Status	• Popular with domestic and international tourists
Opportunity for development	This tourism offering may benefit from increased visibility via curated marketing strategies amongst conscious and niche-interest traveller circles.

4.2.4 Gunung Milung

Standing at 630 metres above sea level, Gunung Milung is a moderately challenging hike featuring submontane vegetation at the summit. Hikers making it to the summit will also be rewarded with a view of one portion of the Tembeling valley, with an occasional carpet of clouds on certain days and times of day. Given that the hiking trail is located within the boundaries of Taman Negara Pahang, PERHILITAN permitting conventions apply for visiting hikers.



Sights along the hike up Gunung Milung
(**Photo Credit:** Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Activity details	A 30-minute boat journey is necessary to reach the starting point of the trail, which is located inside Taman Negara. Operators suggest a 2D/1N or 3D/2N trip, depending on the group's level of fitness and the purpose of the hike. Moderate to challenging.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Local tourism operators/cooperatives. • Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN).
Status	• Popular as a weekend and public holiday hike among local tourists.
Opportunity for development	May benefit from increased visibility via curated marketing strategies targetting conscious and niche-interest traveller circles.

4.2.5 Visit to Kampung Bengoi (Batek Settlement)

Many local cooperatives and operators offer a visit to the seemingly enigmatic and earthbound indigenous Batek settlement, Kampung Bengoi, situated along the Sat River. The settlement features traditional huts made from bamboo, rattan, and palm leaves that reflect Batek culture. Handcraft made with ratis also available for sale. The community still practices aspects of their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle but is currently undergoing steady shifts in subsistence patterns. Many individuals still travel to and from other Batek settlements, such as Kampung Kuala Koh in Kelantan.



Interactions with locals of Kampung Bengoi

(Photo Credits: Top - Ahmad Amir; Bottom - Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Activity details	The settlement may be reached by a 20 – 30-minute boat ride upriver along the Sat River. Most tourists will make a stop at the settlement as part of a tour including water-based recreational activities.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders	• Locals and Tok Batin of Kampung Bengoi. • Department of Orang Asli Development Pahang (JAKOA PAHANG) • Local tour operators/cooperatives.

Status and challenges	• More popular among international tourists. • Storytelling and interpretation are limited. • There is a need to discuss and standardise compensation and procedures for village visits to avoid ad hoc arrangements and inadequate payment to hosts to avoid disagreement and misunderstanding.
Untapped potential	Many of the locals regularly make the trip from Kampung Bengoi in Pahang to Kampung Kuala Koh in Kelantan to visit families and forage for sparsely distributed forest products, which involves some combination of raft and on-foot travel. Journeys like this one would have been undertaken by the ancestors of these Batek individuals for multiple generations, moving from one area to the next. If locals are agreeable, there is almost certainly a market for an adventure heritage trail with some level of bushcraft and storytelling.

4.2.6 Visit to Kampung Kuching (Semaq Beri Settlement)

Culturally distinct from the neighbouring Batek peoples, the Semaq Beri peoples today inhabit settlements that are mostly beyond the Southerly banks of the Tembeling River. This includes Kampung Sungai Kucing which unlike other Semaq Beri settlements, is located much further away from the Jerantut-Kuala Tahan road. Traditionally, the Semaq Beri peoples used to be hunter-gatherers, but most of the men now work in timber concessions and plantations and their dependence and knowledge of the forest has been waning steadily; this is probably true of the residents of Kampung Kucing.



Visiting options	Excursions are usually done as a one-off activity but could also be done in a series of excursions upon request. Either done by boat or using a 4-wheel drive.
Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Locals and Tok Batin of Kampung Sungai Kucing. • Department of Orang Asli Development Pahang (JAKOA PAHANG). • Local tour operators/cooperatives.
Observations	• Popular for governmental and religious authority programmes.

4.2.7 Night Safari and Other Excursions for Wildlife Enthusiasts

Some operators offer a night safari experience that involves either a boat ride down the Tembeling River or a 4-wheel drive trip around the village and plantation roads. Tourists and operators use torches and headlamps to spot animals from the boat or 4-wheel drive. On the occasional good night, elephants can be spotted along the road. On exceptionally lucky nights, tourists would be rewarded with a glimpse of one of the wild cat species of Malaysia, including the Malayan Tiger.

Birdwatching trips are also done occasionally upon demand. The trips can be done between one to three excursions that involve boat rides and occasional walks around the riverbanks. However, interpretation and avian knowledge may be limited amongst local guides.



Night safari at Kampung Kuala Sat (**Photo Credit:** Left - Zikry Adib Kurnia; Right: Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Activity details	Excursions are usually done as a one-off activity but could also be done in a series of excursions upon request. Either done by boat or using a 4-wheel drive.
Relevant Authorities & Stakeholders:	• Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN). • Local tour operators/cooperatives.

Observations

- No excursions yet that focus on herpetofauna. Herping tours are a rapidly growing niche ecotourism sub-industry which currently caters to international tourists who want to photograph certain species and are willing to pay for the chance to do so.
- During preliminary surveys, the THF team heard the calls of the Norhayati's Flying Frog in the forest around Kampung Kuala Sat. Local tour operators also reported the existence of a small tributary of the Tembeling River where snake encounters are common.
- Given the presence of charismatic and sought-after herpetofauna around the village, this market segment seems worth exploring.



4.2.8 Nature, Culture, and history Trail Along the Sat River

Along the Sat River, there is also the option of trekking along the riverbank. The path takes you through different scenes that tell a story of past settlements that have now been gazetted into Taman Negara. There are abandoned village houses, grazing areas and wallows for water buffalo, rubber plantations, orchards, houses of Malay villages., Kampung Bengoi, an indigenous Batek settlement is also located on the opposite side. Parts of the trek feature patches of secondary forests which gradually merge into more pristine rainforests. Remnants of old machinery used to harvest and process rubber can also be found littered across the trek.

This combination of nature, local history, and culture makes for a fascinating journey. However, the pathways are currently not well defined and require improvement. A bridge also exists along the trek which requires fixing. To elevate the experience, narratives and stories could be collected and shared.



Natural and community attractions seen while trekking along the Sat River (Photo Credit: Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Status and challenges	• In its entirety the trek takes around 4 to 5 hours from the Kuala Sat Fish Sanctuary to PERHILITAN's Pos Kelapah. This may be longer depending on how the tourists interact with elements along the trail. One major river crossing exist in the middle of the trek which requires a boat.
Relevant authorities	• Locals of Kampung Bengoi and other Malay locals with houses along the Sat River. • Public Works Department of Malaysia (JKR) • Local tour operators/cooperatives.
Potential to develop	• The trail and many trail elements must be refined and enhanced. This includes a run-down bridge. • Engagements with JKR must be done to remove or redirect electrical wires and poles along the trails. Some are still in use, while others are not. • Collection and curation of tourism narratives should be done regarding the trail. This should encompass the biodiversity, cultural, and local history aspects, with help from experts to ensure the veracity of the said narratives.

Facilities/Amenities:	• Remarks:
Accommodation	Restaurants, or 'warungs' in Kampung Pagi, are plentiful, offering a diverse range of options (roti canai, Ramlee burger). Traditional cuisine from the region can be obtained via homestay bookings only. Grocery shops selling basic items are available with relatively late closing times.
Restaurants/Groceries	• The trail and many trail elements must be refined and enhanced. This includes a run-down bridge. • Engagements with JKR must be done to remove or redirect electrical wires and poles along the trails. Some are still in use, while others are not. • Collection and curation of tourism narratives should be done regarding the trail. This should encompass the biodiversity, cultural, and local history aspects, with help from experts to ensure the veracity of the said narratives.
Jetty/ Tourism centre	• Basic jetty available. • No collective village tourism centre exists. However, information centres for several independent cooperatives are available.
Community Areas	The local mosque, Masjid Kampung Kuala Sat functions primarily as a community area for communal celebrations.

4.3 Kampung Bantal

Kampung Bantal is located nearby to the confluence of the Tembeling River and the Sepia River. The rivers in this part of Hulu Tembeling are exceptionally wide, shallow, with sandy beaches. The views from a boat ride down the Sepia River around Kampung Bantal are reminiscent of rivers closer to the deltas, with wading birds such as the Red-wattled Lapwing scattered across the sandy banks. This is a large village and a meeting place for the Hulu Tembeling community. It is recognisable by its large football field with the Istana of the royal family of Pahang in the background. Kampung Bantal is also the last of the major Malay villages to be connected to the tarred portion of the Kuala Tahan-Mat Daling Road, serving as one of the few places to charter a boat to reach the harder-to-access villages such as Kampung Gusai and Kampung Mat Daling. Farming is the main source of income, particularly from rubber and banana plantations, which form the backbone of the local economy. Tourism revolving around riverine activities provides supplementary income. Kampung Bantal has a certain charm and tourism appeal. Unfortunately there is limited to no suitable accommodation due to previous flooding issues.



*(above) A scene from Kg. Bantal's iconic football competition which even attracts teams from Terengganu to participate;
(below) View of Istana Sri Tembeling*





Map of highlighted tourism assets and activities around Kampung Bantal.

As with the previous two villages, Kg. Bantal is a vantage point from which visitors can access fishing areas and river recreation at some of the small streams. The village is also known for its water sports festivals.

'Mengerau' is a communal fishing method traditionally practised in Hulu Tembeling during low water levels. It requires a number of people working collectively to drive fish into nets. Bamboo stakes are collected and put into position as part of the process. Both men and women are involved and the activity is enjoyable for all involved.

Visiting options	‘Mengerau’ is a traditional fishing method often done during low water levels. The method involves two parties, one responsible for providing an enclosure by installing and holding fishing nets and the other herding the fish into said nets. This is often done communally in a festival after the flooding season.
Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Bantal. • Tourism Pahang. • Local tour operators/cooperatives.
Status and challenges	• More popular amongst the niche domestic angling tourists from nearby regions. • No specific dates are available, which could enable tourists from further regions to plan their trips to Kampung Bantal.
Untapped potential	This festival has high cultural and spectacle values that could be leveraged as a scheduled festival, especially under Tourism Pahang. This may attract international attention to the village.

4.3.2 Buffalo encounters

Visitors to Hulu Tembeling are often welcomed by the sight of large herds of water buffalo. The rearing of these animals constitutes an important tradition not only in Hulu Tembeling but also across much of maritime Southeast Asia. Local owners frequently allow tourists to observe or engage closely with the buffalo, leaving a lasting impression of these animals as a distinctive and characteristic feature of the landscape.



Buffalo feeding at Kampung Bantal (Photo Credits: Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Buffalo owners. • Local tour operators.
Status and challenges	• Only popular with local tourists. • Good marketing strategies are required to communicate tourism values.
Untapped potential	With appropriate measures in place to mitigate challenges such as predation by wild cats, supervised encounters with water buffalo have the potential to serve as a strong regional flagship activity.

4.3.3 Tasik Jemual (Birdwatching & Kayaking)

Tasik Jemual is an ox-bow lake situated near Kampung Bantal that used to be connected to the Sepia River. The area surrounding Tasik Jemual was once cleared to make way for agriculture, evident by the presence of banana trees and ‘mengkuang’ (*Benstonea* sp.) plants around the lake. Although the environment has been substantially modified by human activity, the lake retains a scenic quality, with the presence of ‘mengkuang’ leaves contributing to a sense of untamed character. The presence of Asian Openbill Storks (*Anastomus oscitans*) indicates habitat conditions suitable for waterbirds, habitats that, according to Aki Jalil, an experienced birdwatching guide from Kuala Tahan, are relatively scarce within the Kuala Tahan/Hulu Tembeling region.

This provides an opportunity for the lake to be a waterbird birdwatching site. The waters are also placid, which is conducive for kayaking activities catered for beginners and families. A site of Mat Kilau’s fort during his fight with the British can be found near the lake, which adds a historical element to the lake, but no part of the building remains today.



Sights around Tasik Jemual
(**Photo Credits:** Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Visiting options	Tourists can reach this lake via scenic, unpaved village roads on foot or by motorcycle, or charter a boat upriver along the Sepia River, which in itself is a tourism product. Birdwatching trips and kayaking activities can be done as a morning or evening excursion.
Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Landowners around Tasik Jemual. • Local tourism operators.
Priority actions for tourism product development	• Engage local landowners around Tasik Jemual and obtain necessary written permissions. • Key local champions must be identified to lead the effort in making Tasik Jemual a viable ecotourism product. • An inventory of avian life must be conducted to assess current suitability for birdwatching activities. • Water quality assessments need to be done to determine the current feasibility for water-based activities in the lake. • Explore opportunities for a community-led syntropic agroforestry effort to restore the degraded habitat while benefiting local communities economically. This effort could be paired with voluntourism opportunities.

Facilities/Amenities:	Remarks:
Accommodation	Basic accommodations exist, but many are not in acceptable conditions for tourists. Currently, the number of accommodations is sufficient to meet demands.
Restaurants/Groceries	Restaurants, or 'warungs' are available with uncertain opening hours.
Tourism Centre	No collective village tourism centre exists. However, information centres for several independent cooperatives are available.
Jetty	Basic jetty available.
Community Areas	The village centre functions as a communal square where residents gather around local eateries and rest huts.



4.4.1 Fishing and Sightseeing at Jeram Perahu Sungai Sepia

Jeram Perahu Sungai Sepia is a rapid located in the upper reaches of the Sepia River, characterised by a rocky substrate typical of upstream river environments. The aesthetics of the river is reminiscent of rivers in highland areas, such as those present in the Crocker Range, Sabah, without being as high in elevation. The rainforests beyond the banks of the rivers are partially within the boundaries of Taman Negara Pahang and partially within the newly gazetted Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve (ASARTR).



Rapids of Jeram Perahu at Sungai Sepia (**Photo Credits:** Top Left - Ahmad Amir; Others - Zikry Adib Kurnia).

The proximity to these two protected areas means that wildlife sightings are common along the banks. In terms of permitting, tourism activities in the river and on the surrounding banks do not need a permit from PERHILITAN or the Pahang State Park Corporation. This may be different if activities are conducted deeper in the rainforests.

Tour operators from Kampung Bantal and Kampung Gusai often bring tourists to Jeram Perahu for fishing and sightseeing excursions. Anglers will charter boat and porter services for the chance of landing large mahseers from the rapids of 'Jeram Perahu'. Recently, however, it has become increasingly harder to obtain mahseers, let alone ones that are big enough to satisfy international trophy anglers. For experienced swimmers, the fast currents of the river can provide a stimulating challenge to swim against.

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Local tour operators/cooperatives. • Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN). • Pahang State Park Corporation.
Status and challenges	• Popular amongst domestic tourists for fishing and picnics from surrounding regions, and certain niche international tourists focused on angling. • The increasing difficulties in fishing for mahseers are an indication that some conservation measures may be necessary, such as designated no-fishing zones and periodic fishing moratoriums.
Untapped potential	According to local guides and PERHILITAN community rangers, there are natural tourism assets within the surrounding rainforests, such as Rafflesia vines and buds, as well as nesting trees of hornbills. These assets could enrich the tourism offering around 'Jeram Perahu' and appeal to a larger international tourist demographic. However, it is important to sort out permitting with the relevant agencies and lay out guidelines for sustainable tourism use of these natural assets.

4.4.2 Lata Raok

A 5-minute walk into the rainforest from the banks of the Sepia River lies 'Lata Raok', a short waterfall which flows into a small pool. Surrounded by dense vegetation, tourists would feel like they have just stumbled upon a secret gem in the rainforest as they approach the waterfall. Tour operators primarily bring tourists for a swim stop in the pool next to the waterfall.



Tourists wading in Lata Raok (**Photo Credits:** Top Left & Right - Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir; Bottom Left - Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Local tour operators/cooperatives and boatmen.
Status and challenges	• Popular amongst domestic tourists. • The pool is small and cannot accommodate large groups of tourists. Despite this, tour operators do routinely bring large numbers of tourists to the spot, raising concerns regarding exceeding the carrying capacity of the area.
Untapped potential	With sustainable use in mind, Lata Raok is already sufficiently exploited. Therefore, strategies should be implemented to better manage and regulate its use to ensure long-term sustainability.

4.4.3 Culinary experiences - cooking classes and food tasting

The traditional cuisine of Hulu Tembeling is exceptional and noteworthy. Dishes such as smoked buffalo meat and patin tempoyak are made more complex and interesting with traditional condiments such as sambal hitam, asam rong, and sambal budu terung pipit. This is made better by fresh ingredients from the rainforests and rivers of Hulu Tembeling.

Given the warm and outgoing nature of the locals of Kampung Gusai, this important culinary heritage could be showcased in regular cooking classes and food tasting sessions for tourists. An important driver for such activities could be the many chatty elderly and middle-aged women of the village, providing entertainment to visitors as they teach local cooking techniques.



Delicacies from Kampung Gusai

(Photo Credits: Top Left - Zikry Adib Kurnia; Others - Ahmad Amir).

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Gusai. • Local tourism operators.
Priority actions for tourism product development	• Determine local interest in developing such a tourism product. • Identify leaders to drive the development of the tourism products. • Curation of information regarding dishes and ingredients and linking these information into a distinct narrative for Hulu Tembeling cuisine.

4.4.4 Kampung Gusai Fish Sanctuary

A local from Kampung Gusai and his brother had initiated the establishment of a fish sanctuary by taking money and the time to consistently feed fish around a small bay by the riverbank. Several different fish species can be seen from the bank, such as lampam, and kerai. The area could benefit from having structures and signage that denote the existence of a fish sanctuary. This could be enriched by several interpretation boards on the fish and their ecology.

He also noted that he noticed the increased difficulty in catching fish, which he thinks may be due to overfishing. With the endorsement of the Pahang Royals, the sanctuary could be a symbolic vessel in which interventions such as temporary fishing moratoriums and no-fishing zones could be introduced to the region.



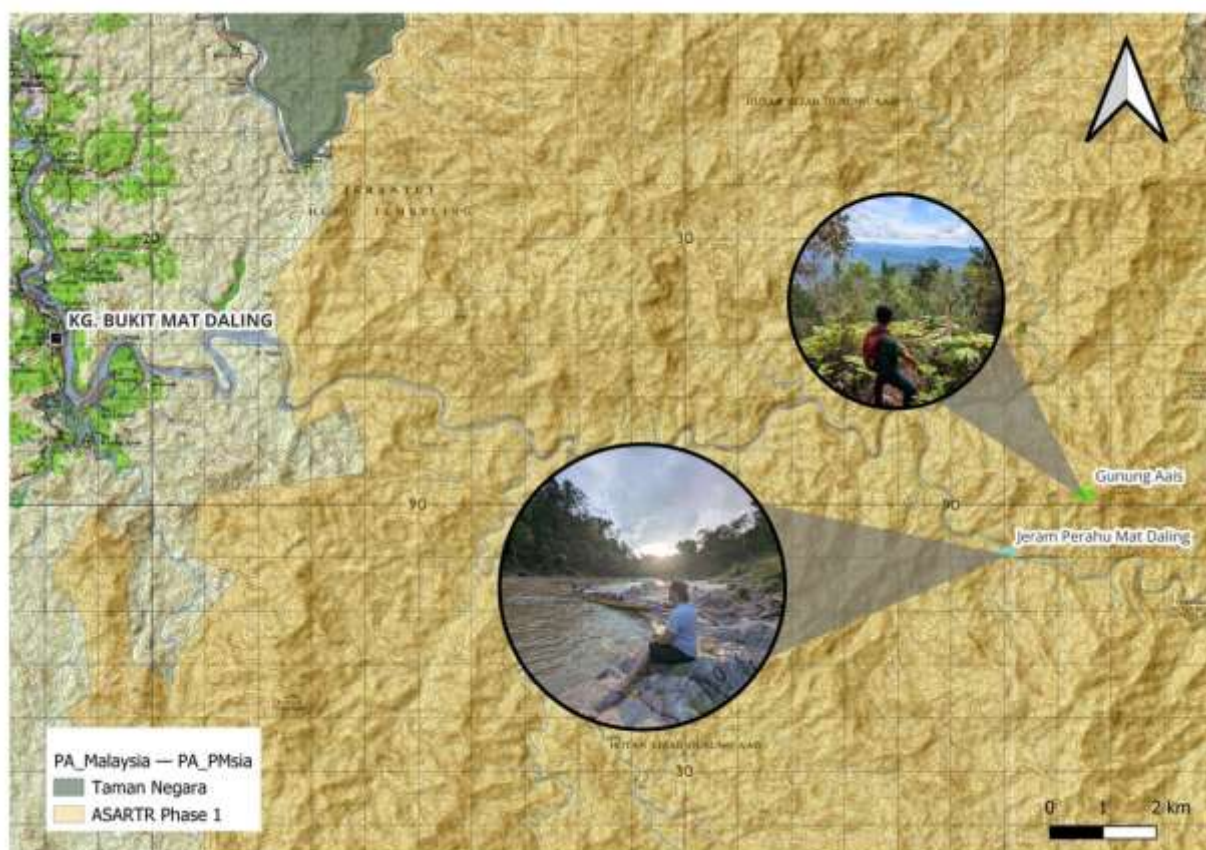
View from Kampung Gusai Fish Sanctuary and one of its founders
(**Photo Credits:** Zikry Adib Kurnia, Ahmad Amir).

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• The brothers who initiated the project. • Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JPKK) Kampung Gusai. • Department of Fisheries Malaysia. • Pahang Royals.
Priority actions for tourism product development	• Determine local interest in developing such a tourism product. • Identify leaders to drive the development of the tourism products. • Curation of information regarding dishes and ingredients and linking these information into a distinct narrative for Hulu Tembeling cuisine.

Facilities/Amenities:	Remarks:
Accommodations	Basic village-style accommodations exist and are sufficient to meet current demand. This may not stay the same if Kampung Gusai receive increased tourism attention.
Restaurants/Groceries	Restaurants, or 'warungs' are available with uncertain opening hours. 'Warungs' double as grocery stores with a significantly limited variety of items sold.
Tourism Centre	No tourism centre available.
Jetty	Basic jetty available. Otherwise, boat passengers will board the boat from the river when the waters are lower.
Community Areas	The local mosque, Masjid Kampung Gusai and occasionally, the local primary school, Sekolah Kebangsaan Gusai, will host communal celebrations. A small community hall is also available for use.

4.5 Kampung Bukit Mat Daling

Kampung Bukit Mat Daling lies at the end of the Kuala Tahan-Mat Daling Road. It is the furthest village from the closest town, Jerantut and is the closest in proximity to the Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve (ASARTR) amongst the major Hulu Tembeling villages. The village is accessible via boat ride along the Tembeling River and a narrow and poorly maintained gravelled road. During rainy seasons, it is recommended to access the village via boat as the gravel road may be hazardous. Despite difficulties in accessing the village, Kampung Bukit Mat Daling possesses many important infrastructures, such as a clinic, a government-operated internet centre, a kindergarten, electricity from TNB and clean water from Pengurusan Air Pahang (PAIP), and a primary school with boarding facilities.



Map of highlighted tourism assets and activities around Kampung Mat Daling.

Primarily, the economic activity that sustains families in Kampung Bukit Mat Daling is rubber tapping in individual plots of land, with a significant number of locals also tapping rubber for FELCRA. Besides the production of rubber, locals also tend to fruit trees in their orchards and sell fruit crops for secondary income. Recently, the village has experienced a steady growth in their tourism appeal, leading to many locals serving as guides to key natural attractions such as Mount Ais and Jeram Perahu (Kampung Bukit Mat Daling version). Also, as a result of this growth, homestays and other accommodations have been established by locals, providing the opportunity for additional income.

The vibrant nature of the villagers, the community's continued reliance on traditional practices, combined with infrastructure and increasing tourism opportunities, provides a strong foundation for future economic growth. As they are still in the early stages of this growth, the community needs to guide and plan for the long-term sustainability of this economic boom.



4.5.1 Gunung Aais

Situated within the newly gazetted Al-Sultan Abdullah Royal Tiger Reserve (ASARTR), Gunung Aais has a relatively modest summit height of 816 metres above sea level. Despite this, the mountain supports hill dipterocarp forests with montane characteristics at its peak, in addition to typical hill dipterocarp forests and lowland dipterocarp forests at lower elevations (Chua et al., 2026). While the summit itself offers only limited views of the surrounding rolling hills, the ascent is the true highlight, featuring gushing cascades and mist-shrouded forests.

Phytogeographically, Gunung Aais is of considerable interest as it lies on the western extremity of the Terengganu Hills. This recognised biogeographic barrier separates species on the eastern and western flanks, fostering endemism on either side. At this transitional position, Gunung Aais hosts a unique mixture of flora. Species once thought to be restricted to Terengganu, such as the granite-growing orchid *Habenaria paradiseoides* and the pitcher plant *Nepenthes domei*, occur here. Conversely, species not typically present on the East Coast, including *Codonoboea pyroliflora*, *Phyllagathis hispida*, and *Thottea grandiflora*, are also found (HIS Holdings, 2023). This distinctive biogeographical setting enhances the mountain's potential to attract high-end naturalist tourism, provided that sufficient support is in place from the Pahang State Parks Corporation.



Sights and views along the hike up Gunung Aais

(Photo Credits: Top - Ahmad Amir; Bottom - Nur Akmalah Mohd Khadzir).

Visiting options	Usually done as a 2D/1N or 3D/2N trip, but it takes about 6 hours to reach the summit for most healthy adults. Requires a 4-hour boat ride from Kampung Bukit Mat Daling to the starting point of the hike.
Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Pahang State Parks Corporation. • Tour Operators. • Persatuan Malim Gunung Pahang.
Status and challenges	• Not frequently summited, but does receive a steady flow of hikers. • The Pahang State Parks Corporation has set no clear protocols regarding permitting as of yet. • Local hikers have noted that the fee (approximately RM600, minimum six persons) is relatively high due to the extensive boat travel required. This may limit its appeal among domestic tourists compared to Gunung Milung. However, it presents an opportunity to position the experience for a higher-end international market, with support from the Pahang State Parks Corporation.
Untapped potential	The rugged and scenic terrain, coupled with its distinctive biogeographical setting and rare plant species, Gunung Aais have the potential to appeal to the high-end naturalist tourism market. Findings from the recently completed ASARTR Scientific Expedition 2025 may support this idea.

4.5.2 Jeram Perahu Hulu Tembeling

Taking approximately 4 hours to reach by boat, this rapid is one of the best places in the region for mahseer fishing. Owing to its remoteness, the mahseer population here remains relatively unaffected by overfishing compared to other fishing sites in Hulu Tembeling. The area is characterised by rapids framed by granite outcrops on both ends, giving way to a calmer stretch of river downstream. Upstream of the rapids, conditions are more favourable for catching mahseer, though anglers must push their boats across rocky and sandy areas to bypass the turbulent section. For anglers adventurous enough to venture to the extreme upper reaches of the Tembeling River, they might stand a chance at landing the Dwarf Snakehead (*Channa limbata*), prized for its almost ornamental appearance.

Tour operators would often provide a campsite by the river with a porter and cooking services. Visitors have the opportunity to enjoy their catch on the very same day, freshly prepared and cooked. Just over the rocky banks of Jeram Perahu, the remnants of a chalet compound can be seen, such as a public toilet, concrete stairs, and the base of chalets, which is evidence that significant efforts have been made by the locals to commercialise the area.



Fishing and foraging activities at Jeram Perahu Mat Daling
(**Photo Credits:** Zikry Adib Kurnia).

Visiting options	Fishing trips to Jeram Perahu range from short 2D/1N outings to extended excursions lasting one to two weeks, catering to anglers with both the passion and the means to pursue them. A four-hour boat ride is required to reach Jeram Perahu from Kampung Bukit Mat Daling.
Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Pahang State Parks Corporation. • Tour Operators.
Status and challenges	• Popular mostly with local anglers, with the occasional celebrity clientele. The area also sees some niche-interest international tourists.
Untapped potential	Renovation of the dilapidated public toilet and the building of basic structures, such as rest huts and permanent roofs, upon the remnants of structures near Jeram Perahu might provide some comforts that tourists would be prepared to pay for. These structures should be as basic as possible to facilitate easy maintenance.



Abandoned chalet compound near Jeram Perahu Mat Daling
(**Photo Credits:** Zikry Adib Kurnia).



Successful catch!
(**Photo Credits:** Justine Vaz)

4.5.3 Mat Kilau Trail (Jejak Mat Kilau)

The Persatuan Penggerak Rekreasi Terengganu (Penggerak) has undertaken efforts to revitalise the Mat Kilau Trail, which runs from Kampung Bantal through Kampung Mat Daling to Kampung Pasir Raja in Hulu Dungun, Terengganu. The route retraces the historical movements of the national folk hero, Mat Kilau, during his retreat into the rainforests of Hulu Tembeling following the Pahang Uprising.



At present, the trail lacks formal interpretive material, relying largely on the narratives provided by local guides. The journey is challenging, requiring long boat journeys, strenuous treks through dense rainforest, multiple river crossings, and sections accessible only by four-wheel drive. The trail is best suited for tourists seeking rigorous adventure tourism experiences in its current form.

In July of 2022, the Terengganu state government announced that they would be working with the Pahang state government to position the Mat Kilau trail as a key tourism product spanning the two states. Kampung Bukit Mat Daling could be a major stop before tourists venture into the extensive hinterland.

Box 3: Mat Kilau, The Warrior Who Walked This Land

Long before this trail had a name, it had a story.

Muhammad Kilau bin Rasu, born around 1866 in the Pahang highlands, grew up as the son of Tok Gajah, a respected chief of Budu in the Tembeling region. He came of age during a period of profound change, when the British Residential system was steadily reshaping the political and social order of the Malay states. For many traditional chiefs, it was a transformation that felt less like progress and more like erasure.

By April 1892, Mat Kilau had become one of the most prominent figures in the Pahang Uprising, a broad resistance movement that began in Semantan in 1891 under the leadership of Dato' Bahaman. At its height, Mat Kilau led over a hundred followers through the interior of Pahang, moving through the same river valleys and jungle ridgelines that define this landscape today. He knew this terrain intimately, and that knowledge was his greatest advantage.

When British forces burned his stronghold at Budu in May 1892, Mat Kilau did not surrender. He gathered his people and disappeared into the forest, retreating through the Tembeling corridor toward the Kelantan-Terengganu borders. It was a journey that demanded extraordinary endurance, navigating dense jungle, river crossings, and mountain passes with soldiers in pursuit.

That escape route is, in essence, the path you are walking now.

The Jejak Mat Kilau trail traces approximately 70 kilometres from Kampung Bantal in Hulu Tembeling to Pasir Raja in Hulu Dungun, crossing between Pahang and Terengganu through some of the most remote and pristine forests in Peninsular Malaysia. Every river you ford, every ridge you climb, every hour you push through the undergrowth connects you to a journey that was made out of necessity, conviction, and sheer will.

Walking this trail is not simply a physical challenge. It is a quiet conversation with history, an acknowledgement that the ground beneath your feet once carried the weight of something much larger than any single expedition.

Step carefully. Walk with purpose. The forest remembers.

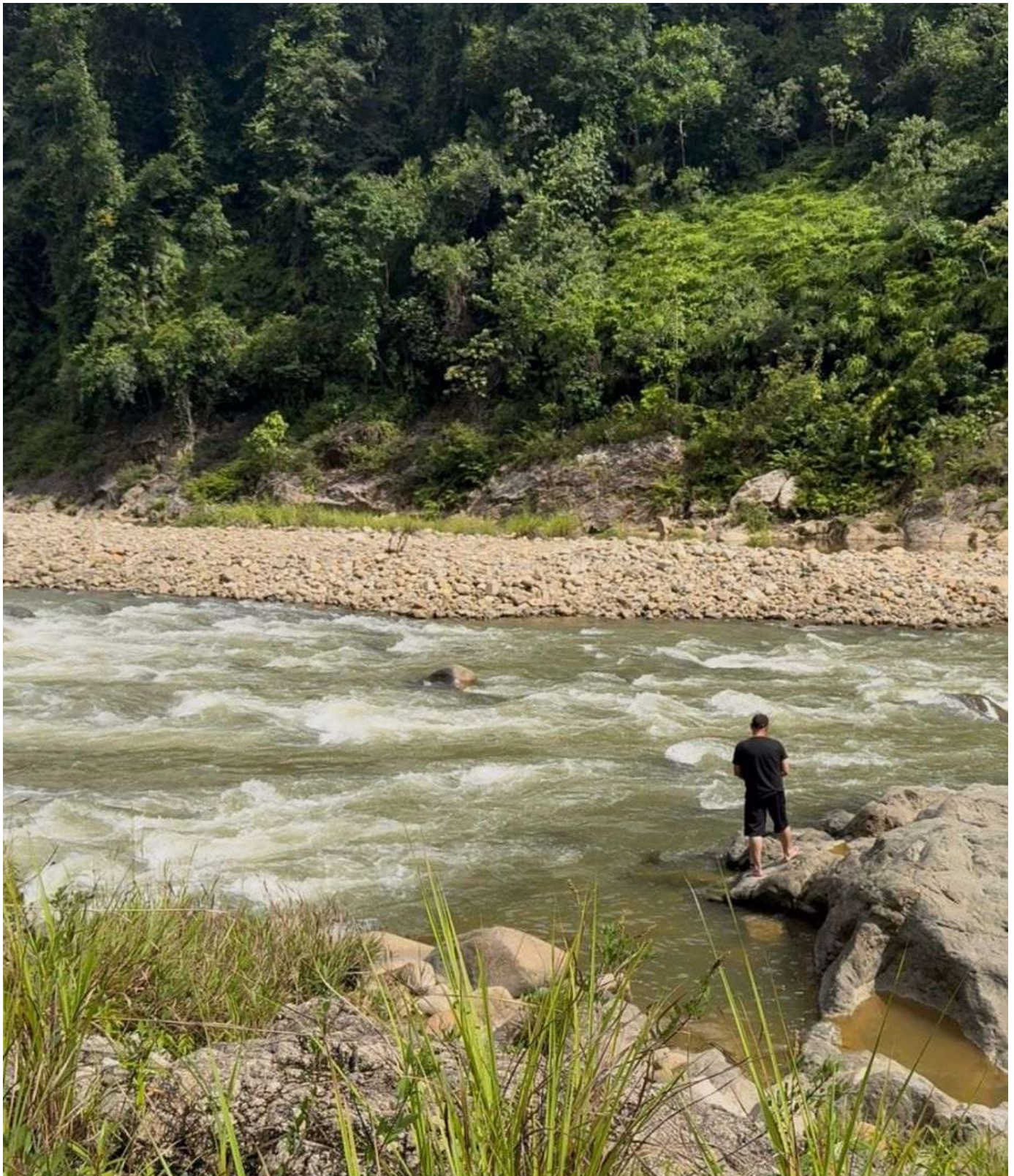


*Jejak Mat Kilau excursions
(Photo Credits: Nur Akmalah
Mohd Khadzir).*

Relevant authorities and stakeholders	• Tourism Pahang. • Tourism Terengganu.
Priority actions for tourism product development	• Engage with Tourism Pahang and Tourism Terengganu to explore where support can be given. • Signages and interpretation could solidify the Mat Kilau trail as a trademark tourism offering in the region via branding and brand positioning. • Careful curation of narratives needs to be done with the help of historical experts to ensure the veracity of information provided by guides during the trail. • The development of basic infrastructure along the trail is necessary to ensure the safety of tourists. Such improvements could also broaden the appeal of the trail, making it accessible to a wider market segment.

Facilities/Amenities:	Remarks:
Accommodations	Homestays and village-style accommodations exist and are sufficient to meet current demand. Temporary campsites are also available near the Tembeling River on demand.
Restaurants/Groceries	Restaurants, or 'warungs' are available with short opening hours. Grocery stores with a significantly limited variety of items sold.
Tourism Centre	No tourism centre available.
Jetty	Basic jetty available.
Community Areas	The local mosque and the community hall host communal celebrations for the village.

5 A STRATEGY FOR CBT IN HULU TEMBELING



5. A Strategy for CBT in Hulu Tembeling

The recommendations for Sustainable Tourism in Hulu Tembeling are holistic in nature. They are conceptualised around a grounded appreciation of the natural, cultural, and historical values of this region as described by local communities through participatory mapping processes and ongoing interactions with the community over the course of the project.

The recommendations are cognisant that tourism businesses and services within different villages are at different stages of readiness to receive visitors. The study adopts a pragmatic and phased approach to supporting sustainable tourism; this involves supporting those that are ready and using the initial phase to optimise opportunities for people to gain experience and exposure which will empower them to benefit in subsequent phases of development.

Based on the household surveys and focus group discussions with the local community, there is a growing awareness that the establishment of ASARTR will be beneficial to them. Life in Hulu Tembeling is beset with particular challenges of being remote from the conveniences of modern living. They are challenged by poor road conditions and unreliable internet connectivity that have doomed numerous attempts to build markets for local products and farming produce. Seasonal flooding and the impacts of wildlife damage to agriculture additionally impact local efforts.

Visitors to Hulu Tembeling are welcomed as they boost spending from outside, providing opportunities for valuable supplementary income. Local people are aware of the limitations and seasonality of tourism but most see it as something that complements their participation in agriculture, rearing livestock and fishing. As an activity that appeals to the younger generation, there is hope that tourist arrivals will be steady enough to provide sufficient justification for family members that are working in nearby towns and distant cities to return to live in the village to run businesses. This is particularly significant for those villages that are characterised by aging populations.

Sustainable Tourism in Hulu Tembeling has an essential role to play in achieving the conservation goals of ASARTR. The communities of the Hulu Tembeling provide a human face for how the tiger reserve confers important benefits to local people. It sustains the health and abundance of the Upper Tembeling river and its tributaries by protecting its upper catchment and sustains the natural habitat of wildlife which has a role in minimising human-wildlife interactions that are exacerbated by forest clearing. In other words, although the Hulu Tembeling communities live outside the ASARTR boundaries, their socio-economic wellbeing is a measure of how a well-managed protected area conveys benefits and advantages to local people in buffer areas which are also valuable conservation landscapes. In this way, the model set out in the ASARTR case is equally important as a model for other parks and reserves nationwide.

Aside from availing themselves of work opportunities in enforcement and management of the tiger reserve, local people have the potential to convert the appeal of the forested interior to intrepid visitors seeking an experience beyond the ordinary. The recommendations provided here are centred on enabling and empowering local people to benefit from the opportunity that is presented to them.

5.1 Hulu Tembeling branding strategy

To maximise benefits to local people and also to manage expectations, it is recommended that Hulu Tembeling be marketed as a rustic off-the-beaten track community-based tourism experience in the heartland of Peninsula Malaysia. A visit here should be seen as an opportunity to appreciate the distinct culture and unique lifestyle heritage of people that make their lives deep in the interior. Branding and imagery should showcase the river and waterfalls as a major feature, river cruises and fishing and foraging as recreational activities and an opportunity to appreciate local culinary heritage. Observing wildlife should be positioned as a bonus (requiring additional investment of time) rather than a guaranteed expectation.

The reason for this positioning is to attract travellers that are seeking authentic experiences and willing to spend additional time in the Hulu Tembeling landscape. Additionally, this sector would be more accepting of the more basic accommodation offerings which are the norm currently. This strategy is also designed to contrast with the current visitor experience to Taman Negara NP at the Kuala Tahan entrance which is more characterised as mass tourism where interactions between local people (Boatmen, guides, restaurants) and visitors are more superficial and transactional.

The approach to communicating sustainable tourism for Hulu Tembeling is to encourage visitors to Kuala Tahan to consider venturing further up the Tembeling River in order to access a different experience from the national park. Collaborations with accommodation providers at Kuala Tahan can help to bundle the Taman Negara experience with a visit to the hinterland. This approach will also create an added marketing dimension for upselling travel further upriver even for those that have previously visited Taman Negara.

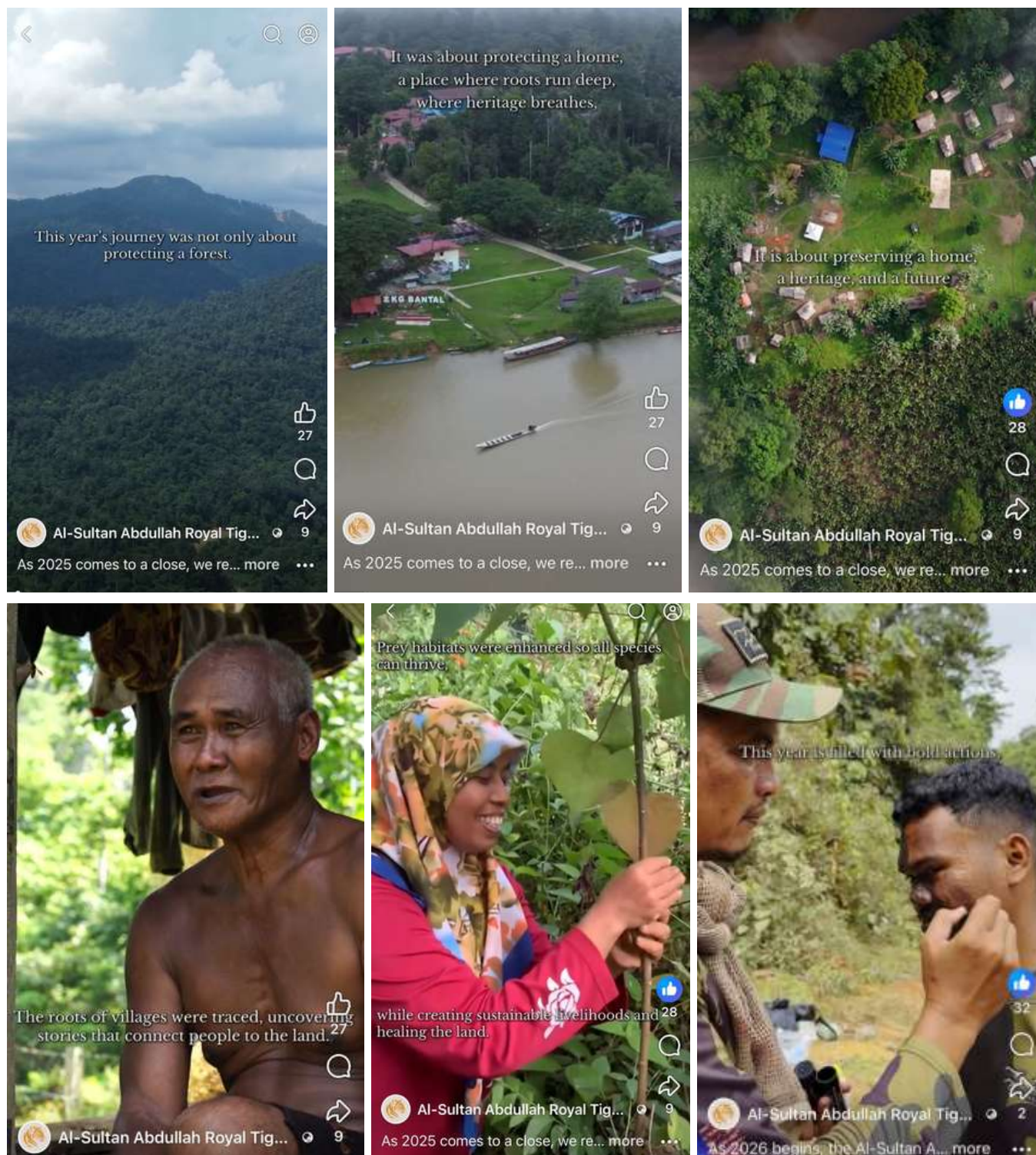
This matchmaking of visitor and destinations is advisable to attract visitors that are more likely to be interested in the environment and curious and respectful of local cultures and customs. This echoes the desire from local people that visitors are respectful and understand that they should adjust when entering into village life by learning and adopting local norms.



*The **Faces of Hulu Tembeling** communications campaign supported by the EU Project focusses on the community living at the border of ASARTR and acknowledges them as key partners and beneficiaries of conservation action.*

5.2 Sharing conservation actions through the community lens

The communications strategy for the ASARTR work has been to prioritise respect and regard for local communities in Hulu Tembeling, positioning them as partners in the effort to save the Malayan tiger. Conservation goals achieved through the protection of the forest also preserve the safety and wellbeing of people of this region. We also benefit from the deep knowledge they have of the landscape, the ability to navigate the rivers, and the valuable support they play in supplying conservation teams with catering, logistics, and habitat restoration work. Many local people are also employed to work in ASARTR. These connections are also an important and appealing part of the sustainable tourism story and should be consistently employed and reinforced in all communications.



5.3 Visibility in the landscape

Beyond the visibility ASARTR receives in the media and through digital media, it is also important that ASARTR and its managers (PTNP/EMS) boost visibility of the conservation and community development within the Hulu Tembeling. Visitor Information Centres and small info galleries can be managed in collaboration with some of the main villages. These Centres would have an important role in communicating the conservation significance of ASARTR and the role of the community in participating in various roles such as protection, prey enhancement, and providing transport and support to field staff, for example.

These Centres should also strengthen sustainable tourism: they should provide information and advice on local accommodation, restaurants, packaged experiences and be a convenient point to obtain entry permits from PTNP, plan itineraries, book services, and receive guidance on regulations and prohibitions. The Centres could also be helpful sales points for local products such as seasonal fruits, handicraft and signature culinary specialities and condiments. Additionally, once the ASARTR Research Centre is completed, the satellite centres in the village can encourage visitors to head to the Centre to complete their Hulu Tembeling visit. Priority sites for the Centres should be Kg Pagi, Kg. Kuala Sat, Kg, Gusai and Kg. Mat Daling. In some cases, suitable buildings already exist and what is needed is appropriate signage and arrangements with local organizations or tourism committees to mind the Centre.



The strategically located Visitor Information Centre in Kuala Tahan is now being refurbished by JKK Kuala Tahan in partnership with Sustainable Tourism Malaysia/THF with funding from the Ministry of Finance.

It is expected to provide a hub for promoting all tourism for Kuala Tahan and Hulu Tembeling. It would also provide the means by which the benefits of working collaboratively across the Hulu Tembeling landscape may be achieved. The Strategy for stimulating sustainable tourism in Hulu Tembeling will involve creating favourable conditions for visitors to Kuala Tahan to extend their stay and venture into Hulu Tembeling.



6 RECOMMENDATIONS



6.1 Communicating and marketing Hulu Tembeling

Consistently adopt the branding strategy in visual communications tools developed for ASARTR (photography, videography, social media). This approach has been emulated in the content used for marketing communications for the ASARTR which follows the approach of focus on the human dimension of the Hulu Tembeling landscape (highlighting local personalities and the charm and rhythms of traditional life) alongside the activities of conservation and research which take place here.

This messaging should also be carried by writers and influencers to maintain some consistency in how Hulu Tembeling is positioned. Promotions and public awareness at events fielded by PTNP and EMS, and forthcoming messaging on its websites and social media channels can emulate this approach.

In terms of target audiences for communications, it is important that there is a good balance of content in Bahasa Malaysia and English. Domestic visitors should continue to be a staple market for Hulu Tembeling businesses for the foreseeable future. This should be regarded as healthy strategy to insure the Hulu Tembeling communities against shocks and negative impacts arising from overreliance on international travellers.

Communications support to local communities should be continued by EMS/ PTNP as part of the ongoing work to strengthen the economy of the Hulu Tembeling community which also has a role in the sustainable financing plan.



Local social media accounts with large followings can also be enlisted to echo the branding approach adopted for the Hulu Tembeling. Popular accounts Left like Bantalku seem to have already accepted the branding potential of ASARTR and are applying it in their own communications.

6.2 Establish and/or strengthen local tourism organizations to create effective coordination framework

Consultations with local communities highlighted the need for stronger coordination and collaboration both within and between villages. There is broad agreement that competition is unproductive and can create disharmony, while collective effort would better position communities to benefit from tourism opportunities. Some villages have already introduced systems to ensure fair distribution of benefits, such as boatmen rotation practices.

It is recommended that a Tourism Development Committee be established under existing community structures across the Ulu Tembeling villages. Each committee should appoint dedicated coordinators responsible for convening regular meetings, liaising with ASARTR teams, and sharing relevant updates to support sustainable tourism development. These village-level committees may coordinate with neighbouring villages on an ad hoc basis, with at least two annual strategic planning workshops held at the Hulu Tembeling level to align on direction, programmes, and activities.

A local Ulu Tembeling Sustainable Tourism Coordinator should be engaged to support the Committee in convening regular meetings, liaising with government stakeholders, and coordinating with EMS, PTNP, and other implementing partners. From this study we have learned that each of the main villages tends to operate tourism in its own user niche based on what is most time and cost effective. So although villagers might enjoy a trip to Jeram Perahu Hulu Tembeling for recreation and enjoyment, in terms of day trip products, they would take visitors to the nearest tributary or waterfall to them. This is a good way of naturally engaging each village in caring for different touristic resources, especially if their role is acknowledged through an official entity such as the proposed Committee. The Committee is also a good channel for EMS/PTNP to disseminate officially the policies for issuing permits and controlling access to the river. Local people can be very effective in helping to assure the security of the river against outsiders if they have the opportunity to form decisions and participate in enforcing them.

The committees would also play a key role in collecting reliable data on visitor numbers and tracking local participation in tourism, including the number of active businesses and individuals earning income from tourism-related activities. In addition, they would serve as a conduit for training, certification opportunities, and support for tourism-adjacent enterprises, including entrepreneurship and business development initiatives.

Tourism Development Committees, together with any registered community-based organisations, would provide an administrative platform to access funding from government and non-profit sources for sustainable tourism and capacity-building efforts. They would also coordinate with relevant authorities, including the District Office, MOTAC, PTNP, JPSM, and DWNP, on tourism-related matters in Ulu Tembeling.

Once fully operationalized, the Committee will help coordinate initiatives that can be implemented collectively, including joint training programmes such as Malim Gunung, Nature Guide, and CTRE, as well as exposure tours and experiential learning opportunities, and support for women-led activities within the villages. The Coordinator will also work closely with the MBZ project communications team to implement a communications plan that effectively targets the appropriate tourism market.

6.3 Refine Hulu Tembeling Sustainable Strategy and Action Plan with community

The participatory mapping of tourism values has generated a wide range of locally identified sites of interest, activities, annual events, and potential tourism products. Some of these are already in operation, while others remain opportunities for further development. To ensure a strategic approach, a clear process is needed for communities to review, validate, and refine the study's recommendations, and to prioritise village-specific actions that can be realistically implemented with available resources.

Beyond improvements to shared infrastructure such as information centres, jetties, shelters, toilets, trails, bridges, road access, and signage, planned efforts should also include relevant training and certification. These priorities can be scheduled within a defined timeframe, with progress tracked through clear deliverables for monitoring and reporting.

Additional initiatives can be planned for later phases as further support is secured, either by the ASARTR team or by the communities themselves from existing government agencies or through corporate responsibility programmes. Strengthening community agency is essential, as local groups can also access support through district-level initiatives to drive their own development.

Specific actions to take:

- Draft plan to be translated into BM to be presented in a series of FGDs to be reviewed and refined. The final version to be provided to the communities for their use.
- Recommendations for each of the villages to be discussed in the context of support for next steps, highlighting initiatives where they would appreciate support. Examples might include assistance to improve infrastructure, strengthen local participation through micro-credit schemes, obtain health and safety certification, training and capacity building, and any applicable government initiatives.
- The draft Guidance Document to be presented in a Workshop for the knowledge and inputs of the District Office, PTNP, DWNP, Fisheries and Forestry in a workshop for comment and alignment in their own operational guidelines and policies.
- The document can also be utilized to access other sources of development funding and support. EMS or partners should help facilitate relationships, programmes and engagements that help to activate the plan and attract resources in terms of funding.

6.4 Assist community organizations to access Forest Reserves and Taman Negara NP for CBT

Among the Hulu Tembeling villages, several are more reliant on accessing forest and riverine areas that are within either Forest Reserves under the jurisdiction of the Pahang Forestry Department or Taman Negara NP managed by PERHILITAN. The study investigated ease of access and permitting, and found the following:-

Perhilitan/ Taman Negara NP

- Generally not too problematic as there is an established practice of allowing local people's access to Taman Negara as long as permits are obtained.

Pahang Forestry Department

- Access to the Forest Reserves adjacent to Kg. Pagi to access the Lata Layang Layang, Gunung Dulang, and Gunung Pelangai trails and scenic spots has been constrained for some time. The procedures to obtain permits are difficult and unclear which makes it difficult to develop these assets for CBT.
- The ability of Kg. Pagi to access important sites for tourism outside ASARTR is beneficial because it gives them a distinct product and an opportunity to participate in the Hulu Tembeling sustainable tourism story, and assisting with managing tourism impact across the different villages by providing alternatives.
- There is a valuable precedent in Janda Baik, Pahang, where a local community has obtained a lease from Forestry to manage a forested area with a hiking trail and waterfall. This initiative which began with some assistance from FRIM provides a working model that could be replicated here.

Specific actions to take:

- Local villages to engage with PERHILITAN to discuss systems to enable and authorise the use of Taman Negara for riverside night walks across the river from Kg. Pagi, Kg. Kuala Sat, Kg. Bantal and Kg. Gusai with their cooperation.
- Efforts to be made to engage with the Pahang Forestry Department to discuss establishing an effective system for Kg. Pagi to be given a stewardship to bring visitors to Lata Layang Layang and Gunung Dulang trails in close cooperation with the Forestry Department.
- New systems and tourism opportunities to these areas to be communicated to the Jerantut District Office which has indicated its support for enhancing tourism in the greater Taman Negara NP area in collaboration with local communities.

6.5 Initiate programmes to assist local community to improve quality and competitiveness of their accommodation

Tourism accommodation in Hulu Tembeling currently spans a wide range of readiness and quality, from well-equipped rooms with ensuite bathrooms and air-conditioning, to basic A-frame chalets, and more modest dormitories with shared facilities. Information on health and safety certification is generally limited or unavailable. There is a need to engage relevant local and regulatory authorities to support the registration and improvement of these businesses so they can meet the criteria required for listing by tourism agencies.

Specific actions:

- ASARTR managers can support local operators in upgrading their facilities through assessments and audits, and potentially by facilitating access to small loans for necessary improvements.
- In addition to meeting essential safety and hygiene standards, this support can encourage the adoption of more sustainable practices, including water conservation, waste management, and energy efficiency.
- Once accommodation providers meet a minimum standard, they can be registered and promoted through the Visitor Information Centre, which will be linked to the centre in Kuala Tahan to support bookings and visitor coordination.



(L) Basic dorm-style homestay at Kg. Gusai; (right) Newly refurbished rooms at Kg. Pagi managed by the local village organization



Other types of homestay accommodation available in Kg. Pagi

6.6 Establish campsites and lodges to enhance equitable distribution of tourism benefits

To address the lack of capital among local households for business development and ensure that all households benefit directly from tourism, it is strategic for ASARTR managers to support the establishment of village campsites and lodges that can be collectively owned and managed by village tourism organisations. Such models enable shared ownership and distribution of benefits while encouraging the entire community to have a sense of collective responsibility for maintaining quality visitor experiences.

With the ability to shape both design and operations, ASARTR project managers and partners can embed best practices and demonstrate sustainable tourism models for the wider community. These shared facilities can also create local employment opportunities, with residents engaged on a full-time or part-time basis in roles such as maintenance, housekeeping, catering, and activity coordination.

Based on field surveys across different landscapes, several potential sites are presented in the following table for further exploration, although this list is not exhaustive.

Table 6.1 Ideas for shared tourism accommodation in the Hulu Tembeling villages

Village	Type of accommodation	Location/ land status	Rationale
Kg. Kuala Sat	- Community Campsite - Open land with toilet, bathing and cooking facilities. - Tents and camping gear may be hired.	Riverine area under along Sg. Tembeling - under jurisdiction of Dept of Irrigation and Drainage	This village receives requests from student groups and government groups. A campsite would provide an affordable accommodation option for larger groups to visit and earnings would be shared by village cooperative members.
Kg. Bantal	- Community campsite and bird hides - Secure campsite close to small wetland and lake that is suitable for birdwatching	Located in land accessible about 10 mins boat ride from Kg. Bantal.	Kg. Bantal is somewhat congested and lacks sufficient land for local residents. There is no space to build tourism accommodation. Having a campsite in a scenic area would enable visitors to Kg. Bantal to enjoy fishing and river activities with an overnight stay.

Kg. Gusai	• Nature lodge and campsite • A modest lodge of 10-12 rooms which can be established within ASARTR area. • Additional campsite suitable for larger groups and group activities.	Land close to Jeram Perahu Sg. Sepia	Kg. Gusai homestay accommodation options are still very basic and potentially not eligible for certification without upgrades. A lodge within ASARTR provides PTNP the opportunity to raise revenue through collecting access permits and a concession fee from the operator of the lodge. A suitable training ground to model hospitality and best practices for local businesses.
Kg. Bukit Mat Daling	• Glamping sites • Full-service glamping capabilities to be managed on demand by an operator with local staff and service providers.	Land at Sg. Lurut and Jeram Perahu Sg. Tembeling at site of abandoned chalet complex.	Mat Daling is the village most closely associated with ASARTR, and these initiatives will enable local communities to participate in tourism economy. Suitable for fishing trip excursions, providing a higher level of comfort for visitors and family groups than what is available at present.



Abandoned chalets within Taman Negara NP close to Sungai Sepia that could be refurbished with local management



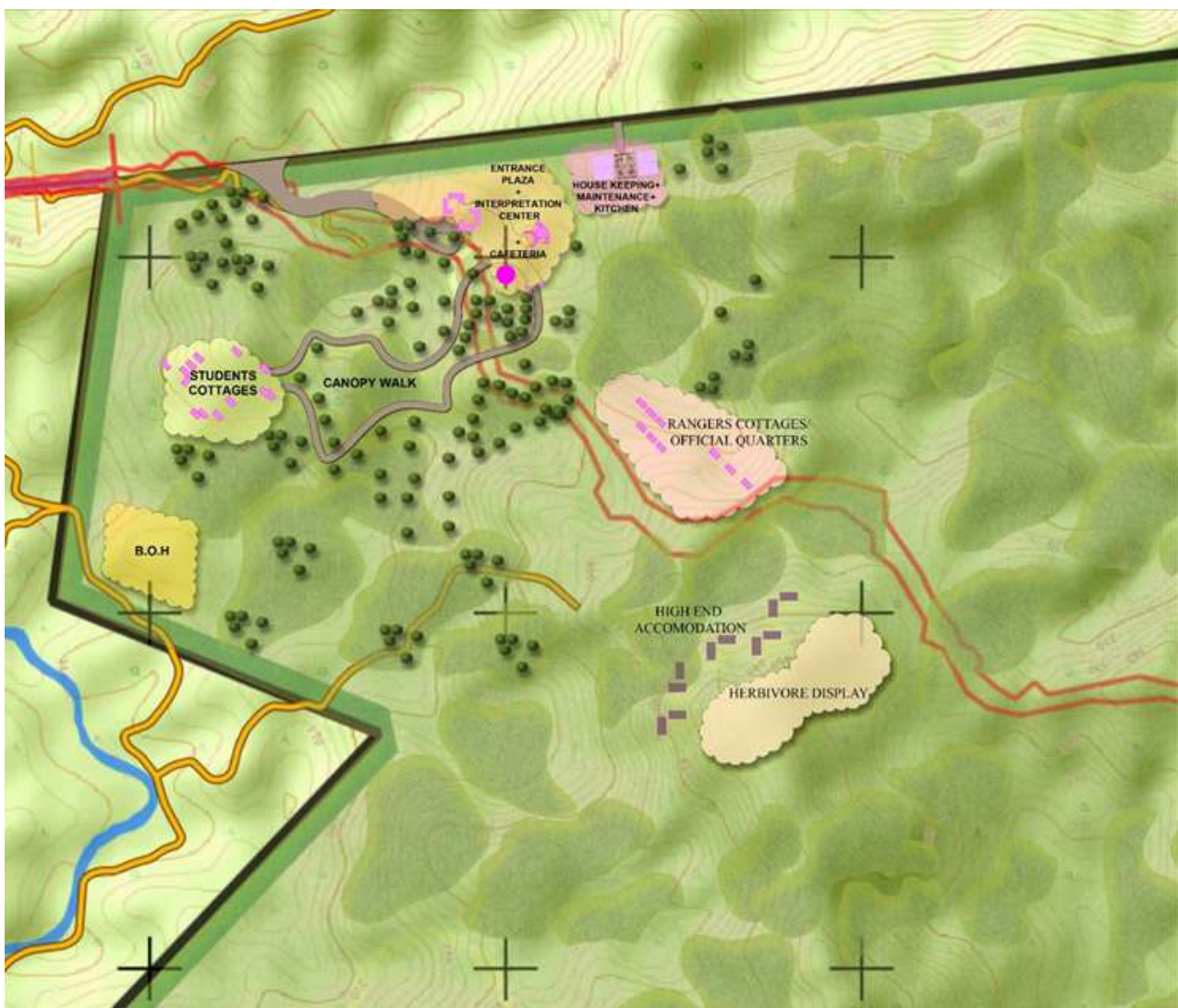
Campsite at Kuala Lurut during the ASARTR Scientific Expedition in 2025 - similar campsite could be established within ASARTR to cater for visitors to Jeram Perahu Sg. Sepia

6.7 Establish educational exhibit and visitor area for the new ASARTR Research Centre

A site near Kg. Bukit Mat Daling, previously designated for a discontinued road project, is proposed to be repurposed as the central Research Centre complex for ASARTR. The Centre is also envisioned to support the local sustainable tourism strategy by offering visitors an opportunity to learn about protected area management and tiger conservation efforts led by EMS and PTNP, with support from government funding and international partners.

While its primary function is to serve as a base for enforcement, research, and conservation activities, a dedicated section will be curated to provide insights into the Centre's operations. This will help foster a deeper understanding of ASARTR's role, as well as the importance of Hulu Tembeling in conserving wildlife, safeguarding the upper catchment, and protecting one of the last remaining pristine rainforests in Peninsular Malaysia.

Most visitors are expected to continue on to nearby villages, where they can access community-owned accommodation and local services such as guided walks, village-based activities, river recreation, and fishing.



Some of the concept and design inspiration for ASARTR comes from Sabah and Sarawak. Gunung Mulu National Park has an attractive well-appointed Visitor Information and Interpretation Centre which sets the stage for visiting this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Modest, comfortable and clean dorms and lodges form the main offering for park managed accommodation.



Danum Valley Conservation Area within the Yayasan Sabah concession a handful of super premium lodges for those able to afford it and yet it is fully booked year round with a very good return. In addition to this, the more humble research lodge is also very popular. The appeal of the Borneo Rainforest Lodge is the pristine rainforest as a whole and not any one species.



6.8 Establish ASARTR as a base for rainforest research and education

Once established, the ASARTR Research Centre will be able to provide a base for scientists and conservation biologists looking for a base for their own research or to train graduate students. Generating a steady flow of both national and international researchers is an important component for sustainable financing for ASARTR in terms of fees and services. From the perspective of the sustainable tourism strategy for Hulu Tembeling, it will also ensure continued employment at the Centre in terms of hospitality and guiding. Visiting groups will also be utilising the services of local transport and boats plying the Tembeling River sites, increasing tourism spending in the landscape.

Specific actions:

- Launch the scientific expeditions documentary and hold symposium to highlight the biodiversity significance of ASARTR and appreciate the researchers that participated.
- Follow on interest for a second scientific expedition or smaller study groups can be registered so that these can continue via Hulu Tembeling in the interim.
- PTNP/EMS to determine pricing and procedures to apply to conduct research in ASARTR.



Images from the 2025 Scientific Expedition of ASARTR. Subject matter experts were invited from all major Malaysian research and tertiary institutions. There would be considerable interest in follow up research and also to use the landscape for teaching.

6.9 Implement programmes to ensure Orang Asli benefit fairly from tourism

The social assessment of the Orang Asli villages of Kg. Kuching and Kg. Bengoi, close to Kg. Kuala Sat recommends that it is premature for them to be thrust in full-scale tourism activity at least from the point of view of accommodating visitors to their communities. For Kg. Bengoi, particularly, there is still a need to assist them in meeting their basic needs. There will be time in the future to enable and support them to engage with visitors in a more meaningful, dignified and equitable way. Having said that, the batek of Kg. Bengoi have stated that they appreciate the opportunity to earn from hosting visitors who come mostly to observe jungle craft skills such as blowpipe demonstrations and fire-making. In recent times, the Semaq Beri community of Kg. Kuching have confidently demonstrated their ability to host visitors with sewang performances, handicraft displays, and other showcases for VIP visitors.

It is generally accepted that the ASARTR project will address community welfare and wellbeing through its social programmes, for sustainable tourism, it is recommended that Orang Asli village leaders or representatives also be invited to participate in Hulu Tembeling Tourism Coordination meetings.



Orang Asli from Kg. Kuching participating in a discussion during the household surveys conducted by THF with Nature-based Solutions and EMS.

Specific actions:

- The Orang Asli leaders interviewed indicated that they would like to be involved in tourism-focussed interactions and demonstrations but have said that they would like to see the compensation standardised so that it is more equitable for their efforts.
- Some of the Orang Asli had shared that that they have stopped making handicraft because of the difficulty in finding materials needed for the craft. It is worth considering if it is possible to explore whether support can be given to acquire plant materials for these crafts and to cultivate source materials in the vicinity of the village.
- The project coordinator for sustainable tourism in ASARTR and among the Hulu Tembeling communities should also explore potential programmes to help build capacity and confidence for storytelling among Orang Asli so that they can host visitors and interpret their culture and practises to visitors that would be keen to know more.
- The Batek Junglehuts project run by ECOMY in Kg. Tabung offers a good indication of what can be done to elevate the current practice of visiting Orang Asli villages. It is a much more sophisticated experience now with strong local participation. It would be well worth organizing an experience sharing session with Kg. Bengoi community members having the opportunity to visit Kg. Tabung.



Traditional craft skills are still alive among Batek in Kampung Bengoi. The ability to access raw materials and to obtain fair prices are some of the challenges that can be addressed to help revive interest in craftmaking.



6.10 Implement training and capacity building for tourism adjacent and support services

Aside from accommodation providers, it is recommended that programmes be implemented to strengthen local businesses. Examples of this include improving the equipment, hygiene, service and presentation of local restaurants and cafes, conducting boat handling and safety and rescue training for boatmen, providing first aid training for interpretation and storytelling programmes for nature guides through official certification and CTRE (Continuous Tourism-Related Education) programmes.

The following table provides a description of some of the tourism-related training that has should be beneficial to ensure the availability of well-trained and experienced tourism workforce.

Table 6.2 Training and capacity building needs for the Hulu Tembeling community to enhance sustainable tourism and professionalisation of local offerings

No	Training and skills building	Objectives	Target Participants	Notes
1	Basic Eco-Tourism Training	Introduce CBET concepts, promote environmental conservation, eco-friendly hospitality, and sustainable tourism management	Community members involved in tourism	Raises awareness on balancing tourism and environment
2	Homestay & Tourist Management	Skills in hosting guests, managing visitor experience, hygiene standards, preparation of traditional meals, assist in MOTAC homestay licensing	Homestay operators, community members	Focus on professional and community-friendly tourist experiences
3	Water Safety & Rescue Training	Safety for river/boat activities, first aid, rescue skills	Community members involved in water-based tourism	Collaboration with BOMBA, APM, JPAM
4	Community Licensing as Nature Guides	Train local youth to obtain official nature guide licenses, deliver accurate eco-interpretation	Youth and aspiring nature guides	Ensures professional and legally recognized guides
5	Basic English for Tourists	Basic communication, interpretation, and tourism terminology	Community members interacting with international tourists	Builds confidence in professional interactions
6	Networking & Digital Promotion	Digital promotion of homestays and activities, social media, Google Maps, tourism platforms	Community members, homestay operators	Enhances networking with tourists and operators

6.11 Strengthening food production within villages

If visitor numbers are to increase, there is a need to give thought to ensuring that there are sufficient food resources to cater for both local residents and visiting groups. In villages like Kg. Gusai where there is an aging population and also many households led by single-mothers, there is little time to manage small farms to supplement diets. There is also the additional problem of wildlife raiding fields. Many households have experienced losses arising from macaques, wild boar, and elephants, particularly if their farms and gardens are far from the village centre. If local restaurants and caterers need to purchase ingredients from Jerantut, it would be a costly RM200 round trip.

For this reason, there is value in exploring integrated food systems like the Birumas system designed by Kebun Kota that produces vegetables, beans, and farmed fish in a compact energy efficient system that can be placed within the heart of the village where it can be effectively guarded against wildlife incursions. A pilot initiative is recommended and if successful, it could be replicated in some of the other villages. Another alternative to Birumas is also developing small fertigation plots that can also be an efficient system to communally farm vegetables. This system is used with some success in villages near Kuala Tahan. Some agricultural assistance may also be arranged for this with Agricultural extension organizations.



The Birumas system designed by Kebun Kota Sdn Bhd utilises wastewater to feed farms on its top level. The water which is purified is clean enough for the fish tanks below providing a regular source of tilapia in addition to the vegetables.

6.12 Implement access protocols to safeguard fisheries resources

Fish specialist, Dr. Amirrudin from Universti Malaysia Terengganu conducted a fish population survey along Sungai Tembeling from April to October 2025. His survey revealed critically low levels of commercial fish species such as *kelah* and *tengalan* due to overfishing. Notably, all *kelah* specimens found were very small in size, indicating a lack of mature breeding adults. These findings were presented at a workshop in Kg. Bukit Mat Daling organized by NBS and facilitated by THF. The workshop was attended by community members involved in recreational fishing tourism. During the workshop, the community acknowledged the visible decline in fish and agreed that urgent regulations were necessary.

At the end of the workshop, NBS and the participants agreed on three key recommendations:

- (1) zoning of fishing areas into community-use zones and zones for outside recreational fishing groups;
- (2) regulation of fishing equipment (nets versus fishing lines) according to each zone; and
- (3) implementation of open and close seasons in different zones. These recommendations have since been formally shared with the Pahang State Park to be officially regulated and enforced, aiming to restore fish populations and ensure the long-term sustainability of both the ecosystem and local livelihoods.

The preservation of the health of fisheries resources is important both from a conservation standpoint as well as to assure food security for the Hulu Tembeling communities. Appropriate science-backed systems and processes need to be set in place assuring local people of continued access, and to control overfishing by outsiders. Communicating and regulating these effectively will be important components of a credible sustainable tourism strategy.



6.13 Establish effective waste management

Tourism and increased visitorship will also pose a problem for waste management that needs to be considered. This is already a problem for Hulu Tembeling villages as there is no dedicated waste removal arrangement provided by district authorities. Municipal systems are created for urban areas and rate payers. Special arrangements will be needed for Hulu Tembeling. Presently, waste is buried or burned. Neither is an adequate solution; both create challenges for pollution and public health and undermine the attractiveness of the Hulu Tembeling landscape for tourism.

In Kuala Tahan, the village development committee has recently established a recycling centre and is beginning to operationalise it so that recyclable items can be collected and stowed here for collection by district council authorities. For Hulu Tembeling, this could provide a solution for collecting recyclable items if arrangements can be made in the respective villages to send the cleaned and sorted items to Kuala Tahan.

Specific actions:

- Waste separation: Within each of the villages, an actionable system can be a combination of waste reduction through separating compostable waste and recyclables at individual household level.
- Centralised composting systems: Assistance with composting in ways that do not attract wildlife could be beneficial. Compost produced can then be channelled for free to any village farming and landscaping initiatives. These products can be led by local coordinators.
- Hulu Tembeling Leave No Trace campaign: It is well worth considering instituting a Leave No Trace policy and campaign to encourage visitors to carry out what they bring in. Most hikers and campers would be familiar with Leave No Trace, particularly for going into wilderness experiences where no facilities and services are available.
- The ASARTR team could help to disseminate Leave No Trace and other waste reduction practices through their Visitor Information Centres in Kuala Tahan and across the Hulu Tembeling landscape, and this will also help in reinforcing sustainable tourism messaging.

There are well-established protocols in the Leave No Trace movement to ensure that visitors minimise their impact. These can be customised and normalised for the Hulu Tembeling landscape in which both locals and visitors adopt similar approaches.



6.14 Nature, culture and heritage programmes for children and youth

The preservation and continuation of Hulu Tembeling cultural traditions and understanding of the unique history and heritage of local communities is important for local pride and has a role in demonstrating a strong sense of place for visitors to this region. These can take the form of traditional costumes, music and dance as well as local practices such as foraging for food from the environment in the form of wild fruits, fern tips, and harvesting shellfish from the riverside. Efforts to strengthen these practices should be supported. These can take the form of providing funds for purchasing traditional costumes and instruments, enabling groups to participate in regional or national competitions or training. Local students can also be engaged to participate in placemaking activities in which they document oral history by interviewing their elder family members. The products of these activities can be used in community galleries to provide additional interest for visitors.

With the support of the EU project, a Wildlife Conservation Awareness Programme was held on 23 October 2025 at Sekolah Kebangsaan Bukit Mat Daling to raise awareness among students about the importance of protecting wildlife and preserving natural ecosystems. Through interactive sessions and educational activities, students gained knowledge about wildlife conservation, environmental protection, and the importance of sustainable practices. They also provided an opportunity to nurture a greater appreciation of the natural landscape and the biodiversity of the upper Tembeling. Teachers and parents remarked of how appreciative they were of the programmes and they indicate their support for future programmes.



A youth programme organized by THF, PTNP, and Panthera with local schools was very well received and there is interest in making this a regular feature.

6.15 Signature community-based tourism events for Hulu Tembeling

Each of the main villages in Hulu Tembeling has their main attractions and potential excursions and tourism products highlighted. These they have the potential to develop with the fellow community members and appointed partners. Beyond these, there is also value in encouraging collaboration among the Hulu Tembeling in the form of inter-village sports events such as football, and raft and boat races and traditional water sporting events that have been previously held along the Tembeling. In addition to fostering friendship and goodwill between villages, they also provide an additional incentive for visitors to join to participate in a unique blend of community merriment.

A regular Open Day to highlight ASARTR hosted by PTNP and EMS is also a good practice to adopt. It provides the opportunity to showcase important milestones for the tiger reserve as well as programmes carried out to support the larger Hulu Tembeling community such as employment in conservation, building and contracts, support to local tourism initiatives, improvements to infrastructure and programmes that benefit schoolchildren.

In terms of building connection and collaboration among villages, it has been suggested that ASARTR support and advocate for the Mat Kilau Trail as a signature annual adventure for those who like endurance events. This establishment and upkeep of the trail could be divided between the various villages from Kg. Bantal - Kg. Mat Daling and Pasir Raja in Terengganu. One of the specific actions to be taken in 2026 could be initiating discussions and mutual understanding to formalise arrangements for the Mat Kilau Trail and annual activity.



Raya gathering in which the whole community gathers to share homemade dishes and specialties.

References

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7 APPENDICES



Overview of Progress on Recommendation 6.4 in Kg. Pagi and Kg. Kuala Sat - co-funded initiatives by THF

Under the Sustainable Tourism Network which is chaired by The Habitat Foundation, and funded by the Ministry of Finance, THF was able to provide technical assistance to Kg. Pagi to community to engage with the relevant district authorities and the Pahang Forestry Department to discuss access and co-development of CBT for Lata Layang Layang. The Social Forestry Division of FRIM (Forest Research Institute of Malaysia), led this process which had a very successful outcome. Since the initial joint workshop on 16 October 2025, the Kg. Pagi has registered an NGO for its partnership with Forestry Department. A learning trip was carried out to Janda Baik to meet the Persatuan Ulu Tampik community who shared their experience with managing the waterfall trail and developing the skills needed to manage their service and also the business.

Workshop on “Forest Conservation through Eco-Tourism and Conservation Resources” Location: Kampung Pagi Date: 16 October 2026 Participants: 17 participants from Kampung Pagi Organized by: Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), THF Funding by: MOF/THF	This workshop was held to engage community members to discuss the importance of forest conservation and to explore sustainable economic opportunities. The session highlighted the role of eco-tourism as a sustainable income source while promoting responsible land use and conservation practices. It also provided a platform for community members to share ideas and strengthen collaboration in supporting long-term conservation and eco-tourism development in Kampung Pagi as part of the Greater Taman Negara landscape.
Community-Level Stakeholder Consultation Workshop at Kampung Janda Baik, Pahang Date: 19-20 Jan 2026 Participants: 20 participants from Kampung Pagi Organized by: FRIM, THF Funded by: MOF/THF	Summary of activity: The was held at Kampung Janda Baik, Pahang, to engage local stakeholders and community members in discussions on environmental conservation and sustainable development. The workshop provided a platform to share ideas, discuss challenges in natural resource management, and explore the role of eco-tourism and conservation in supporting both environmental protection and community livelihoods. Overall, the session strengthened collaboration and encouraged greater community involvement in conservation initiatives.

**Establishment Meeting of the
Kampung Pagi Eco-Tourism
Association**

Date: 2 February 2026

Participants: 37 participants from
Kampung Pagi

Organized by: FRIM, THF

Conducted by: FRIM

Funding by: MOF/THF

Summary of activity: The meeting was attended by 37 community members and focused on forming the association to promote community-based eco-tourism, sustainable development, and environmental conservation. Participants set the objectives of the new association, community involvement, and strategies to develop Kampung Pagi as a sustainable eco-tourism destination.

**Gazebo installation along the trail
of the Sat River at Kampung Kuala
Sat**

Date: 4-11 February 2026

Organized by: THF

Funding by: MOF/THF

Construction of 3 Gazebos at Sungai Sat
With the permission of PERHILITAN, three gazebos were built along the Sat River to enhance recreational and eco-tourism facilities for the local community and visitors. The gazebos provide rest stops for visitors with some historical and nature appreciation as part of the effort to strengthen their sustainable tourism offering.



Progress in enabling CBT for the Lata Layang Layang trail with the assistance of FRIM. Learning visit to the Ulu Tampik waterfall in Janda Baik to learn from their experience in CBT from their leaders.