

# Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (SSAF) Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia

## The World's Longest Canopy Walk

“ There are numbers of rules need to be considered in order to develop tourism attraction. First, a largely authentic natural or small scale and richly structured cultural landscape is desirable. Second, a landscape, which offers beauty as well as other cultural, historical, or natural attractions, would add value to the products. Third, good transportation links are required to make easily accessible by the public, and lastly basic tourism amenities too should be available (i.e. comfortable accommodations) as well as the acceptance and support by ”

**K**ulim is one of the small towns in Kedah that has several great attractions, particularly eco-tourism sites and its interestingly unique natural landscape with 13 existing tourist destinations. In addition, 25 areas committed to development have been identified as a source of tourist attractions. Of those, 17 areas are classified as new destinations while another eight are targeted for upgrading. With the overwhelming and rapid industrial development in Kulim, exemplified by Malaysia's first high-tech drive in Kulim Hi-Tech Park, investment from abroad in the form of developing high-tech factories has introduced thousands of jobs to the local people, especially for rural communities. There is a dramatic increase in population and rapid growth in this area.

Sungai Sedim Amenity Forest (SSAF), one of the most popular destinations in Kulim, was chosen as the research setting due to its characteristics and future contributions to host residents. It was recognized as one of the “*Top Five Chosen Destinations in Asia Pacific*” with 24 waterfall cascades along a 15-kilometre stretch. The forest is located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia, within Sedim's area and near Karangan, 30km from Kulim's town. The World's Longest Canopy Walk, the 925m long and 50m high Tree Top Walk (TTW) is among the best attractions at SSAF and offers great aerial views of the natural forest.

The potential of SSAF to be the best eco-tourism destination in Malaysia can be seen from the rich, natural resource base that includes an adventurous waterfall that was promoted as being among the best white water rafting challenges internationally. In addition to this, it has a rich combination of tourism endowments, such as forest recreational parks, waterfalls, and mountains. Adventurous visitors can test their endurance by taking on the rapids with rafting, kayaking, or canoeing while the less daring can opt for soft adventure activities. Having the world's longest Tree Top Walk, SSAF also offers various types of eco-tourism activities like bird-watching, education tourism and research centre visits.

In addition, according to the Kedah Tourism Board, the SSAF, as well as the Merbok River Cruise, are expected to attract more tourists to the mainland of Kedah. This will help the tourism industry to create a more balanced inflow of tourists to the state. The tourism board also will be continuously promoting Kedah's eco-tourism products on a low-key basis in the future and will be waiting for the government to improve

the basic infrastructure in SSAF like public toilets, changing rooms as well as small shelters for visitors. Tourism has become the priority tool of rural planning at SSAF. It helps to energize the rural economy and plays an important role in creating a value-added commercial channel for local produce.

One of the most significant current discussions related to the prospects and future development at SSAF is the nature of tourism products at SSAF, such as the adventure's waterfall and surrounding pristine forest. This often involves small-scale operations and the availability of culturally based or farm-based products can be conducive to wide community participation. There are also reasons why it is important to develop SSAF as a rural tourism destination in Kedah, namely: (i) to create economic growth and outline environmental objectives and (ii) to improve the social conditions of the local communities and tourism operators. Besides that, tourism development at SSAF can bring a range of other benefits to Kulim's areas, such as infrastructural development and spin-off enterprise opportunities. SSAF has great potential to be developed as the best eco-tourism site in the region, which may offer visitors the opportunity to get closer to nature, flora and fauna. They were proud to have TTW in their area, which was acknowledged as international attraction.

There are developmental reasons to promote tourism at SSAF as a growth pole, such as diversifying a state's tourism image and travel packages or alleviating bottlenecks in popular sites. One key opportunity of involving more of the people in tourism activities at SSAF is to develop tourism enterprises where they live. But this is not to say that they will necessarily own an enterprise or even provide the labour just because it is located in a rural area. In this context, sustainable development is one of the best alternatives to be practiced and adopted in any tourism-related development, particularly in SSAF. Thus, various stakeholders must be assisted through capacity building in order to involve the local community in developing a sound tourism development plan that has the potential for generating positive outputs for all.



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