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## Exploring a New Tourism Potential at Kampung Telok Melano, Sarawak Malaysia Post Pan-Borneo Highway Construction

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### Abstract

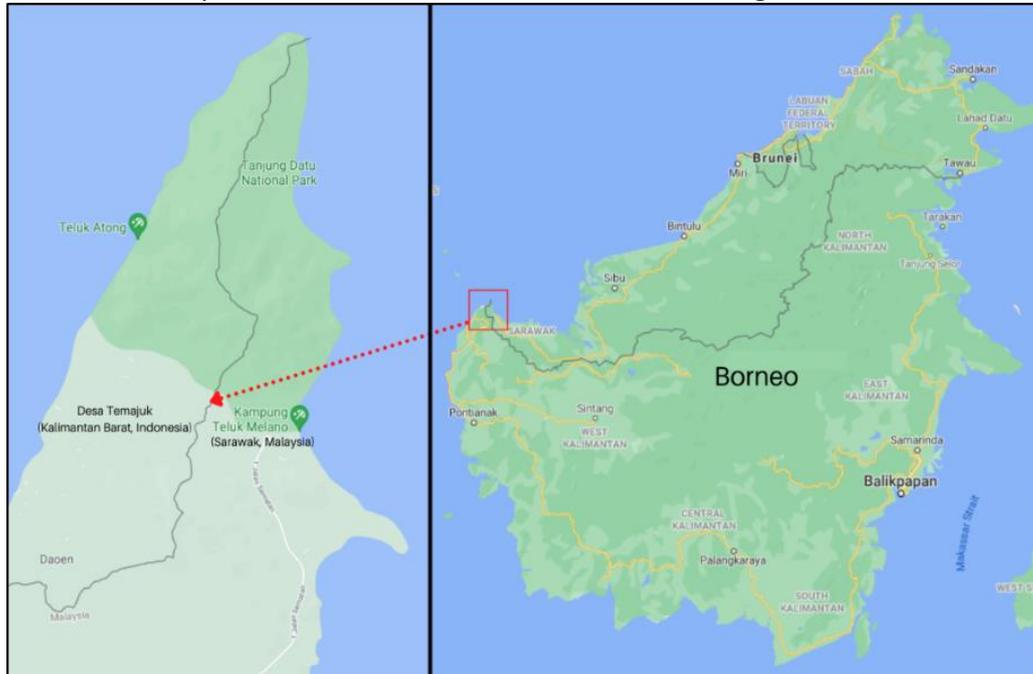
Sarawak's economic sector relies on tourism as a stimulant. This research evaluated the potential of a new tourist destination in Sarawak, particularly in a region involved in the construction of the Pan-Borneo highway. The research was carried out as a pioneering research focus at Kampung Telok Melano, Sematan, which is the starting point for the Pan-Borneo highway project in Sarawak's southwest. The selection of Kampung Telok Melano as the study's location is notable since this region has been featured in a tourist program (homestay) since 1996, governed by Malaysia's Fisheries Development Authority. However, due to a lack of adequate road access as well as basic amenities, Kampung Telok Melano only attracts a small number of visitors from both within and outside the nation. As a result, the impact of the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan-Borneo highway on the local population was examined in this study. This is a qualitative study that incorporated both library and field research. This research extensively reviewed and discussed all the data acquired through recorded conversations, interviews, and observations. According to the findings, Kampung Telok Melano has the potential to become a major tourist destination in Sarawak once the Pan-Borneo highway is completed. This research also revealed that the development of the Pan-Borneo highway improved infrastructure, raised living standards, and offered a source of income for its inhabitants. A quantitative study for additional research must be conducted in the near future to find the actual impact of the Pan-Borneo highway project on Sarawak's tourist sector and local population.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Telok Melano, Pan Borneo Highway, Border Community, Socioeconomy

### Introduction

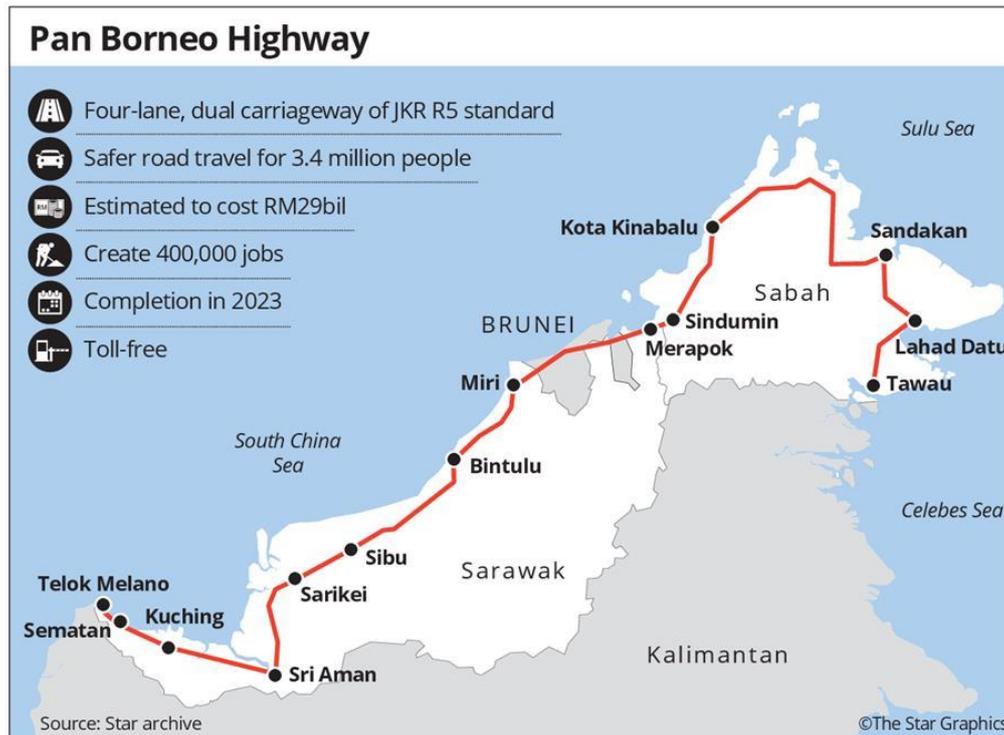
Kampung Telok Melano is a fishing village on the edge of Sarawak's southwest region. On Map 1, the location of Kampung Telok Melano and its neighboring village, Desa Temajuk, in Indonesia is shown. Prior to the opening of the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan-Borneo highway on January 26, 2019, this hamlet could only be reached by boat from the Sematan jetty. Because of the tremendous tides and waves that are perilous for small boats, this location will be cut off from the outside world during the rainy season, which ranges from October to February. If the villagers of Kampung Telok Melano had to travel to Sematan, they would

travel along the shore's edge and wade across numerous rivers. Normally, the journey takes seven to eight hours. As a result of this difficulty, many residents of Kampung Telok Melano began storing up on food in preparation of the rainy season. Some of them even buy their daily necessities at Desa Temajuk, West Kalimantan, around 4 kilometers distant. During difficult times, the people of Desa Temajuk appear to have turned to the Telok Melano community for support (Rachmawati & Dewi, 2021; Yusriadi & Ismail Ruslan, 2015). As a result, the relationship between these border communities has grown over time.



Map 1: Location of Kampung Telok Melano

The Sematan-Telok Melano Pan-Borneo highway building project begins on September 15, 2015, with a new 32.77 km route and a construction cost of RM 580 million. Map 2 depicts the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan Borneo highway, which extends from Telok Melano to Tawau, Sabah. On January 26, 2019, the Sematan-Telok Melano route is officially opened to the public and becomes the starting point of the Pan Borneo highway, also known as Kilometre 0. The construction of this route also contributes development and essential facilities to the public, such as power, treated water supply, telecommunications, and so on.



Map 2 The Pan-Borneo highway Route in Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia  
(Source: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/04/17/pan-borneo-highway-to-bring-growth>)

From the formation of Malaysia in 1963 until 1995, there was no tourism activity at Kampung Telok Melano. Tourism activities began in 1996 with the Homestay program run by the Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia and the Sematan Fishermen Association. Initially, there were 16 houses participated in the Telok Melano Homestay programme, which was expanded to 23 residences in 2000. According to Faiza binti Mohamad, an informant and the Coordinator of Telok Melano's Homestay, before the Pan-Borneo highway opened in early 2019, the majority of visitors were foreigners. Visitors to Telok Melano would remain and dine with their host. The number of registered homestays at Telok Melano increased to 32 after the Pan-Borneo highway was constructed. The services provided had also altered, with tourists no longer staying and eating with the host. The homestay owner, on the other hand, only offers rooms with a shower. The concept is similar to that of a commercial lodging. At Telok Melano, visitors would stay and eat together with their host. After the Pan-Borneo highway was opened, the number of registered homestays at Telok Melano increased to 32. The services offered too had changed where the visitors no longer stay and eat with the host. On the other hand, the homestay owner only provides lodging equipped with a shower. The concept is the same with a commercial accommodation.

In terms of tourist potential, the inauguration of the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan-Borneo route on January 26, 2019 transformed Kampung Telok Melano's landscape from a modest, remote, and isolated fishing village into a new tourist hotspot in the Kuching division. This research will explore the tourist potential in Kampung Telok Melano and highlight its distinctiveness, particularly after the construction of the Pan-Borneo highway.

## Literature Review

This study focuses on the tourist business in Kampung Telok Melano. Previous academic research on tourist activities in Telok Melano was shown to be extremely limited. In comparison to online postings, there are a range of postings that encourage tourism in Telok Melano. In terms of academic research, Nazarudin (2003) conducted a study in Kampung Telok Melano to evaluate the Malaysian government's ecotourism program. This research is confined to reporting on the constraints and problems that the village's tourist economy owners confront. Furthermore, Shuhada et al (2019) stated that prior to the highway's construction, she summed up many challenges faced by homestay owners, which included the travel distance for visitors to visit the area, power outages, telecommunication difficulties, and so on. Homestay owners have to take a variety of initiatives to attract international tourists and overcome a lack of basic infrastructure, such as utilizing generators and solar energy to generate electricity. They, on the other hand, obtained water sources from water catchment areas located at the top of a hill behind Kampung Telok Melano. It is conclusive that prior to the opening of the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan-Borneo route, there was very little potential in the area to be thoroughly studied. As a result, the findings in this research are highly relevant in reporting the most recent data on the growth of the tourism sector in Kampung Telok Melano.

## Research Methodology

This study was conducted utilizing both library research and field research methods. The purpose of the library research was to collect secondary resources such as reports and previous research conducted in Kampung Telok Melano. This study's principal method is site research, which was carried out at Kampung Telok Melano from January 1 to January 15, 2020. The data was gathered through recorded conversations, interviews, and participant observations. In this study, the informants are the village head, the homestay owners, and the villagers. Yuli et al (2021); Irwan et al (2021) used to use this approach to investigate the potential of a tourism destination in Indonesia. During the fieldwork in Telok Melano, the researcher concentrated on observing current tourist development in Telok Melano, interviewing homestay owners, and collected relevant statistics to support data analysis.

## The Findings

This section discusses the study's findings about Kampung Telok Melano's uniqueness and potential as a tourism destination.

### *The uniqueness of Kampung Telok Melano*

To elaborate on the new tourist potential of Kampung Telok Melano, several unique characteristics that constitute the main attraction will be thoroughly discussed. It encompasses the village's unique origin, ethnic diversity and genealogy, the richness of the natural environment, and the uniqueness of life across borders in the area of study.

#### *i) The Historical Value*

The origins of Kampung Telok Melano have been told in a variety of ways. According to Amezan bin Abdul Hassan (45), the name Telok Melano comes from a combination of the words "Teluk (bay)", "Melayu (Malay)" and "No" trees, which are generally known as sugar palms (*Arenga pinnata*). Sugar palms were supposed to be prolific, and they may still be seen in Kampung Telok Melano today. The name "Melano" was created by combining the words "Melayu (Malay)" and "No." The town was founded by a traveller named Melan, according to (Bujang, 2016). Kampung Telok Melano was founded by a chieftain named Haji Taha from

Mempawah, Indonesia, according to Harrison (1970), as referenced in Ishikawa (2010). During Rajah Charles Brooke's reign, an estimated fifty family members led by a chieftain applied for permission to settle in Telok Serabang. Telok Serabang, on the other hand, was already populated, and they were granted permission to establish a new hamlet at Telok Melano. The arrival of a chieftain from Mempawah to Telok Serabang was noted in the Sarawak Gazette on October 1, 1895.

*On the 13th I visited Samatan and on the 15th I proceeded to Telok Sarabang where I met Haji Taha of Mempawa, who arrived at the same time with a number of his people. He reported that seven boats, with seventy men, women and children, left Mempawa on the 6th instant. Unfortunately one boat, the day before (14th), struck a rock off the mouth of S. Temajok during a squall, the occupants-four men-escaping with their property with the exception of 100 gantans of padi. Two boats had arrived; two were with the people who come to grief, and two, for some reason or other, had been delayed en route. The Haji reported that one Merali, a Sambas Tuah, intends coming over with fifteen families to settle in Telok Serabang. (Sarawak Gazette, 1895:p185).*

Despite historical evidence that the chieftain founded an early community in Telok Melano, no residents in the area could claim to be his direct descendants. According to the results of interviews with elderly people in Kampung Telok Melano, many inhabitants are aware of the chieftain. The elder generation, on the other hand, admitted that their ancestors came from Indonesia.

#### *ii) Ethnic Diversity*

From a genealogical or family tree standpoint, the residents of Kampung Telok Melano were descended from Sambas, Pulau Natuna, or a few Dutch-owned providences that are now known as Indonesia. The elder generation in Kampung Telok Melano had never identified their heritage with the Malays in Kuching, according to the findings of the field survey. The locals are all said to be from Sambas, and some have family in Indonesia. The findings are correlated to Sarawak Gazette (1908:p136) literature, which indicated that "all the new settlers of Lundu were of Sambas descent." The identity of Sambas Malays was replaced by Sarawak Malays after the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963. The shift also influenced the usage of the Sambas Malay dialect, which was the mother language of the Kampung Telok Melano villagers, in favor of the Sarawak Malay variety spoken in Kuching. Despite the fact that the residents of Kampung Telok Melano had begun to switch to Kuching's Sarawak Malay dialect, the Sambas Malays' influence on dialect can be observed in their daily conversations, such as *semari* (yesterday), *carat* (want), *sallap* (unaware), and etc. Most importantly, the Sambas Malays community terms *Nek Aki*, *Nek Uwan*, *Along*, *Ude*, *Uning*, *Deng*, *Uteh*, and others are related to the Kampung Telok Melano kinship terms.

#### *iii) Natural environment diversity and richness*

Before the Pan Borneo Highway was constructed in 2016, Kampung Telok Melano was a remote community isolated off by jungle and the sea. The existence of several national parks, notably Semunsam Wildlife Sanctuary, Tanjung Datu National Park, and Talang-Satang National Park, highlights the diversity of flora and fauna nearby Telok Melano (Turtle I. Telok Melano is a gateway to a number of tourist sites. To visit Tanjung Datu National Park, for example, guests must leave Telok Melano and walk to the park. All of the national parks provide a range of unique ecotourism and geotourism options. Tanjung Datu National Park is home to *Rafflesia R. Br.* (Rafflesiaceae), *R. hasseltii*, a species of holoparasitic plant (Shafreena

et al., 2020). The presence of *R. hasseltii* in this park highlights the park's distinctiveness, and the surrounding area has become a tourist attraction. Telok Melano has a lovely beach ideal for leisure, such as Telok Melano beach and Telok Serabang beach and also protected tropical rainforest. The number of tourists to Kampung Telok Melano increased significantly in 2019, especially after the Sematan-Telok Melano Pan Borneo highway route was built.

#### *iv) Cross-border Life*

The establishment of Kampung Telok Melano (Malaysia) and Desa Temajuk (Indonesia) differs. Kampung Telok Melano was formed more than a century ago. Desa Temajuk, on the other hand, was established in the early 1980s. Both border villages share ancestors but are divided by international borders. Based on the concept of nation-building, this had unwittingly resulted in the formation of two diametrically opposed societies. However, there was a significant level of interaction between the two populations. Also, the fact that Kampung Telok Melano is only 4 kilometers from Desa Temajuk makes it attractive to tourists. Before the international borders closed on March 18, 2020, visitors could access Desa Temajuk by motorcycle or *ojek* services (motorcycle taxis). Visitors to Desa Temajuk also commute to Telok Melano to purchase their daily groceries and work as day laborers in the small agricultural sector (pepper, rubber, and oil palm), as well as general workers in Homestay. This relationship resulted in the emergence of a one-of-a-kind border community in Kampung Telok Melano.

#### **Tourism Potential in Kampung Telok Melano**

According to Nazarudin (2003), between 1998 and 2002, Kampung Telok Melano was a popular tourist destination for tourists from overseas. Domestic visitors, on the other hand, were cautious about visiting Kampung Telok Melano because of several factors, including the risk of sea travel (especially during the north east monsoon season), insufficient basic infrastructure such as electricity supply, the lack of a telecommunication network, and water supply during the dry season. Despite its uniqueness, Kampung Telok Melano has become a distant tourist attraction as a result of these conditions. The conditions are comparable to those reported by Mazrekaj (2020) in Odeku (2020) in Luthuli et al (2021) in Msunduzi, South Africa, who concluded that a lack of road or poorly maintained roads are the reasons for less tourists visiting the areas mentioned. Table 1 shows that a modest number of tourists visited the Telok Melano homestay program prior to the Pan Borneo highway's construction, as reported by (Nazarudin, 2003).

Table 1: Statistics of visitors visit at Telok Melano homestays (1998-2002)

Year	Total number of visitors	Generated income (RM)
1998	6	370.00
1999	98	6,360.00
2000	77	6,695.00
2001	381	17,490.00
2002	99	9,875.00
Total	661	40,790.00

Source: (Nazarudin, 2003)

The overall number of tourists to Telok Melano and its surrounding region rose when the Sematan-Telok Melano route opened on January 26, 2019. Between January and December of that year, there were 9,199 visitors to Telok Melano. Table 2 shows the number of tourists who registered at Telok Melano homestays in 2019.

Table 2: Statistics of visitors who boarded at Telok Melano homestays (2019)

2019	Total number of visitors	Generated income (RM)
January	1130	107,615.00
February	1930	218,110.00
March	1667	194,000.00
April	742	86,975.00
May	98	9,323.33
June	367	31,177.67
July	225	18,270.33
August	483	33,370.00
September	227	10,230.67
October	224	15,709.33
November	318	20,342.67
December	1788	224,600.00
<b>Jumlah</b>	<b>9199</b>	<b>969,724.00</b>

*Source: Coordinator of Telok Melano's Homestay*

The increase of visitors to Telok Melano provided new opportunities for the villagers to earn income through tourism. Villager-owned booths sprung up near KM 0.00. The Sarawak state government also approved the development of the Telok Melano Entrepreneurship Corridor near KM 0 in 2020 for a total cost of RM 9.3 million. According to a Utusan Borneo dated March 11, 2021, the entrepreneurship corridor would have food and drink vendors, a wet market, a mini post office, cyber cafés, parking spaces, public toilets, and clean and comfortable restaurants.

From time to time, the Telok Melano homestay program is expected to see some growth. During the early stages of the Telok Melano homestay program, visitors were invited to stay, dine, and participate in the villagers' everyday activities such as fishing at sea, tapping rubber trees, and etc. The original concept of homestay in Kampung Telok Melano changed once the Sematan-Telok Melano stretch was accessible to the public. Owners begin building of new lodges while retaining the original homestay model. Despite the fact that the overall number of homestays has not increased much, their sizes have grown in line with the increased number of rooms on the owners' property. In terms of additional amenities, the Sematan-Telok Melano route has brought with it other fundamental facilities such as 24 hour power, treated water, telecommunications, and etc. As a result, Kampung Telok Melano's potential as a tourist destination in the Lundu division will grow.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The completion of the Pan Borneo Highway route connecting Sematan and Telok Melano has had a tremendous influence on the residents of Kampung Telok Melano and its neighboring areas. Due to its distant and secluded isolation from the outside world, this territory has been unable to develop since the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963. This location is now accessible through a gateway built as part of the Pan Borneo highway project, approximately 56 years later. Tourists are attracted to the beaches of Telok Melano and Telok Serabang, as well as Tanjung Datu National Park and Talang-Satang National Park. Through tourism, the local community socioeconomy has also been fueled by rapid development and growth. The tourism sector, which includes lodging services, food and beverage, transportation, and other activities, has begun to shift the villages' self-sustenance from

fishing and farming. Overall, the uniqueness and tourist potential of an environment that lacks infrastructure and development cannot be realized. With a new road system in existence, Telok Melano continues to see an increase in tourists. The increased number of tourists will have a positive impact on development and provide the locals with a new source of income.

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