Prospects of Geotourism in Limestone Area: Experience from the Langkawi Global Geopark

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Limestone outcrops have long been associated with human civilizations and cultures. Many evidences of early settlements and burial ground have been found in limestone caves. In this modern era, limestone is regarded as a rock of a thousand uses and is being actively mined everywhere for short-term economic gain. At the same time, limestone outcrops have attracted a lot of people who come to admire their aesthetic, cultural and recreational values. Malaysia has very limited limestone areas but they are known for their high aesthetic and scientific values. However, in Malaysia today we are witnessing a conflict between destructive and non-destructive exploitations of limestone. Many beautiful limestone outcrops have been mined because of their high economic value without a slight consideration for other more important values that can bring in more cash in the long term. One of the most outstanding limestone areas in the country can be found in Kilim and Dayang Bunting in Langkawi. To ensure the sustainability of the limestone in the Langkawi geopark, the Malaysian geological Heritage Group (a.k.a KWGM) has been promoting geotourism and conservation through the geopark initiative. At present, Kilim, Dayang Bunting and Machinchang Geoforest Parks have become main attractions for nature lovers. Two of these geoforest parks i.e. Dayang Bunting and Kilim geoforest parks are occupied by limestone. Limestone areas, though monotonous in term of rock type, have high aesthetic and scientific values that can attract tourists, in its karst landscapes, for instance. There are plenty of less-known places for nature lovers, rockhounds, and other landscape-watchers to get out in these limestone areas. The unique sea-karst also supports different mangrove ecosystems that enhance the attractiveness of the areas. It is already proven that Kilim and Dayang Bunting areas have been very successful in getting the most visitors who come to enjoy the nature. This phenomenon is prevalent among foreign tourists and now local tourists have also shown increasing interest in visiting and enjoying the beauty of these areas. The increase in awareness has slowly nurtured a love for the limestone and other geological features in Langkawi in particular and hopefully this would elevate geotourism to a higher level.