THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COASTAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERS AMONG LOCALS AND TOURISTS: A CASE STUDY OF GEBENG – KUALA TERENGGANU TOURISM ROUTE

Nabilah Huda Zulkifli[1], *Putri Haryati Ibrahim[2], Khalilah Zakariya[2]

[1]Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, International Islamic University Malaysia
[2]Department of Landscape Architecture, Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, International Islamic University Malaysia
Corresponding Author: putri@iium.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The coastal area is often promoted in tourism for its natural scenery of the sand, sea and the sun. In Malaysia, most coastal tourism attractions are located near the rural areas and are accessible via the roadways. Through a rural route, tourists have the opportunity to experience the rural landscapes and natural attractions, traditional villages, taste the local food and conduct recreational activities. However, for a route that has not been recognised as a tourism route, the attractions and landscape features are usually sparsely located and lack integration. Consequently, the interesting places along the route are not well highlighted to the locals and tourists. This study examines the Gebeng – Kuala Terengganu coastal route as a case study to identify the significant coastal landscape characters that have potentials to be enhanced for tourism. From the questionnaire surveys responded by 200 people comprising of locals, domestic tourists and international tourists, the findings revealed that recreational activities, infrastructure, accessibility, rural culture and traditional architecture are the most significant criteria for a rural coastal route. The presence of these criteria is fundamental to the development of the coastal route for tourism.

Keywords: Rural Tourism; Coastal Tourism; Landscape Characters; Drive Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The development of the rural areas in Malaysia is an integral focus of the nation to ensure a holistic and balanced regional growth for the country. While the rural areas are known for their agricultural and fishery sectors in the country's economic contributions, they also play a significant role in the tourism sector. Many renowned islands, beaches, natural attractions such as forests, rivers and lakes, and cultural heritage attractions such as villages, crafts and local food, are located in and near rural areas. The coastal areas that offer beautiful sceneries of the sand, sea, coconut trees and traditional villages are able to attract tourists, local and foreign alike. Coastal tourism attractions are often located in rural areas, and they thrive on the natural coastal landscape, the quality of the surrounding area and the attractions and activities that tourists can do while visiting. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the coastal landscape characters that are significant to locals and tourists that could guide the development of tourism route in the coastal areas in Malaysia.

COASTAL TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

The coastal environments possess the greatest and the most productive biodiversity in the world. About 60% of the world's populations live within 60km off the coast (WWF, n.d.). The scenic geographical conditions attract people to explore these valuable resources not only as a place to reside but too also generate incomes such as through fisheries and aquaculture (Ghosh, 2012), or the oil and gas industry such as in Malaysia. Apart from that, coastal areas are one of the primary attractions and a place to carry out tourism activities, through the consumptive and the non-consumptive activities (UNEP, 2009). The consumptive activities refer to recreational activities that people can consume, such as fishing and collecting shells, while the non-consumptive activities include swimming, diving, and surfing. Coastal tourism is one of the oldest tourism industries

(Honey & Crantz, 2007), where it is categorised as mass tourism in recent years (WWF, n.d.). Researchers define coastal tourism as land-based recreational activities, or seaside-related activities conducted close to the sea, where one has to travel away from their residence (Orams, 1999; ICMTS, 2015; Leijzer and Denman, 2013; Ecorys, 2013; UNEP, 2009; European Commission, 2000). According to Abu Hanifah and Mohd Shah (2014), there are many efforts done by the federal authorities in safeguarding the coastal zones in Malaysia. For example, Malaysia is a member of the conventions of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Conservation, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Illegal Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Marine Pollution (MARPOL) and World Heritage Convention (WHC). The Malaysian government also initiated The National Coastal Zone Physical Plan (NPP-CZ) (JPBD, 2012) land use strategic plan as an effort to provide guidelines to protect and safeguard the unique qualities of the coastal zone. However, the promotion of coastal tourism needs to be in parallel with the protection and the conservation of coastal zone resources. The government needs to consolidate with the NGOs, local communities and the tourists' partaking is crucial so that the resources can be enjoyed and valued together.

DRIVE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Tourism activities require tourists to travel from their place of residence to the desired destinations. For domestic tourism, travelling by land is the most common form of transportation as many of the attractions are reachable by private and public vehicles. A research done by the Nielsen Global Survey of Automotive Demand has found that the car ownership in Malaysia has been recorded as the third highest in the world, spiraling up to 93% (The Star Online, 2014). The data is further supported by the findings released by the Malaysia Automotive Association (MAA), where there are 28.2 million units of vehicles, inclusive of cars and motorcycles, registered as of 2017 (Lee, 2017). These circumstances have consequently influenced the domestic travel patterns in Malaysia with a 7.0% increase in visitors, as reported by the Department of Statistics in 2017. Literature findings by Hosen (2015) stated that self-drive tourists dominated domestic tourism activities around the world, where they comprise 70 to 80 per cent of the total tourism trips. Despite these conditions, the drive or road tourism is relatively low in terms of its research and popularity (Connell & Page, 2008; Timothy, 2011; Hosen, 2015), and particularly in Malaysia. The flexibility of self-drive tourism allows the tourists to exercise their preferences of timing, destinations and route options (Holyoak & Carson, 2009). Based on the study conducted by Mokhtar and Shimizu (2016), the most preferred criteria by self-drive tourists that relate to driving satisfaction are: comfortable driving, affordable travel cost, adequate travel time, scenic viewing and sufficient road infrastructure. The components of drive tourism are interrelated with tourism infrastructure in which they offer: (1) efficient road infrastructures, (2) accommodations, (3) tourists information, (4) gas and roadside services including gastronomy and shops, (5) traffic regulation enforcement by the authorities, (6) workshops, (7) drive tourism attractions, and (8) on-road attractions promotion (Hardy, 2003). Drive tourism helps to contribute towards improving the local economy for the communities and various sectors compared to other forms of travel (Meng & Hudson, 2016; Hosen, 2015). The rural tourism, or community-based tourism, is highly dependent on drive tourism because of the accessibility factor (Carson, Waller & Scott, 2002). This condition denoted to the fact that drive tourism is substantially depending on the demand itself. If this form of tourism can attract tourists and elevate the qualities of regional attractions, the industry will also respond by providing multivariate goods and infrastructures.

COASTAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERS

The coastal areas are a susceptible and delicate landscape that need to be protected and appreciated. The quality, elevations and types of coastal landscapes vary depending on the settings, in which the sea actions, speed of the waves and the types of rock compositions shape them. The stretches of coastal landscape settings can provide a spectacularly scenic setting that is important to promote the natural resources surrounding the area. The coastal landscape can be categorised as a scenic sea landscape or seascape. The importance of seascape is highly evident for land use planning such as commercial, industrial, residential, recreation and tourism. The characterisation of the coastal landscapes is associated with landscape character assessment, as it applies an identical method of inventory and field study. However, the significant component in characterising the coastal landscape character is the sea, which makes up the coastal landform (Anderson, 2016). Anderson (2016) highlighted that there are four key characteristics to be considered while assessing coastal features. They are, 1) the maritime influence and experience from the sea, 2) character and experience of the coastal edge and its immediate hinterland, 3) experience of isolated coast and wilderness, and 4) views and visibility through visual assessment. The seascape units that will be identified are the offshore, foreshore and backshore. The seascape character assessment is adopted from the combination of Natural England (2012) and Anderson (2016) as they provided in-depth criteria and judgement in identifying and characterising seascape and landscape characters. According to Zulkifli et al. (2018), the coastal landscape characters for tourism routes are composed of nine criteria, which are, 1) rural culture, 2) recreational activities, 3) traditional architecture, 4) agriculture, 5) natural and landscape features, 6) history and heritage, 6) sensory and experience, 7) accessibility and 8) infrastructures. This study measures the significance of these nine criteria to identify the most influential components that shape the coastal landscape characters along the rural route.

METHODOLOGY

The site selected for this study is Federal Route E3, which is the Gebeng–Kuala Terengganu route located in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It is one of the oldest roads in Malaysia, which connects the southern region to the north-eastern region of the country through the coasts. The coastal route stretches from Johor, passing through Pahang and Terengganu, and ends in Kelantan. For this study, the scope focuses on the states of Pahang-Terengganu stretch as marked on Figure 1 to determine and identify the significant coastal landscape characters for the tourism route planning purposes. The Pahang-Terengganu coastal route has been chosen as the site to be studied due to the huge abundance of natural resources and the greatest number of rural populations compared to other states in Peninsular Malaysia.

This condition is also caused by the geographical location of the states, which is a salient factor for the study due to its unique geographical characters. Based on common factors, Pahang has myriad numbers of the waterfalls, while Terengganu is known to have picturesque beaches. These natural rural attractions carry huge assets to the states thus can contribute to the economic activities of the rural populations. The route was segmented into six segments: 1) Gebeng, 2) Cherating, 3) Kijal, 4) Kemasik, 5) Dungun, and 6) Marang (refer Fig. 1). The total distance of the route from Gebeng to Kuala Terengganu is 192 kilometres. They were segmented for a better identifications and classifications of the coastal characters that were observed along the route.
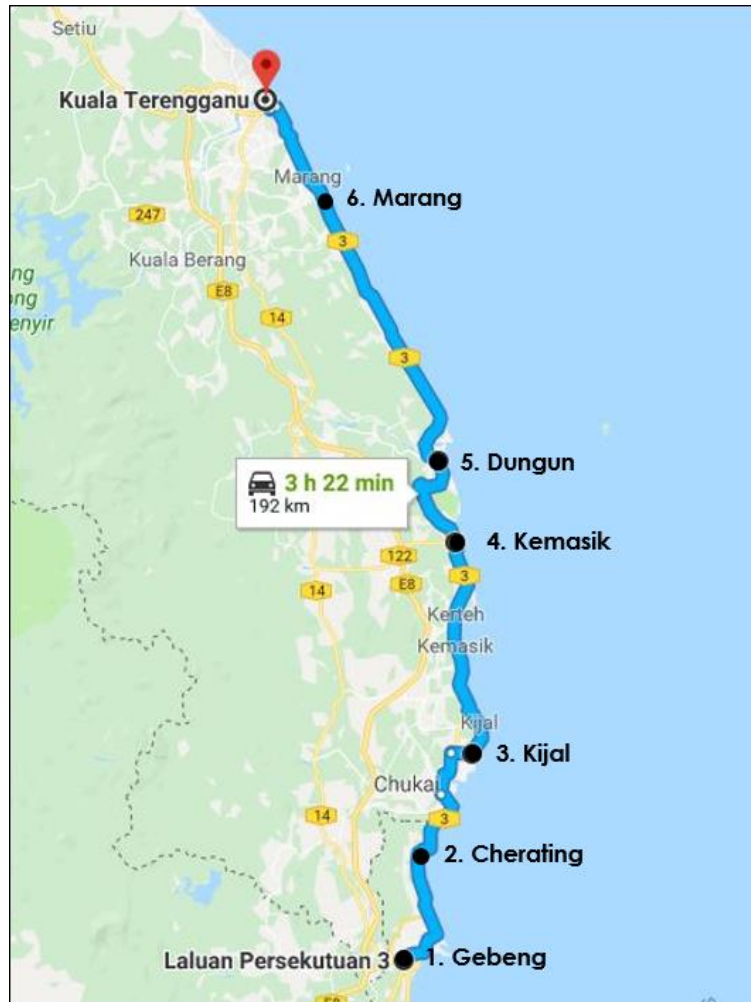
Fig. 1 Case study route from Gebeng to Kuala Terengganu.
Source: Google Maps.

For this study, 400 questionnaires were distributed in the six segments, resulting in a sample size of 200 respondents. Hence, a 50% response rate was obtained. This might be due to circumstances such as poor survey timing, language barrier and unpreparedness of the respondents to cooperate in answering the questionnaires at the survey sites. A convenience sampling method was used to collect data due to the time, cost and the location where a lot of geographical regions need to be covered to distribute the questionnaire, to ensure validity. It is also challenging to determine population size due to the fragmented attractions along the rural route. Even though this sampling method had its limitation in terms of generalisation, it was assumed that the sample would represent both the domestic and local tourists, including the international tourists visiting the attractions. The questionnaires were distributed personally to the respondents that visited the attractions along the route. Respondents were required to answer two sections comprising of, 1) close-ended questions with Likert-scale questions, the respondents' background, respondents' experience, and their ratings of the significant criteria of coastal landscape characters for the tourism route, and 2) open-ended questions for their opinions and suggestions.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Out of 200 respondents, 48% (n=96) of the respondents are female and the remaining 52% (n=104) are male. The findings also show that the domestic tourists are the main visitors of the route, with 114 people (72%) coming from different states, such as Pahang, Selangor, Terengganu, Johor, Kelantan and more, followed by the local people of 51 (25.5%), and the international tourists (2.5%) from Thailand, China and Singapore. Most of the tourists using the route are travelling with their families. The result suggests that the attractions located near to the route attract families to visit and conduct family-based recreational activities, such as picnicking, family day activities and passive recreations. The purposes of the visit are mainly due to the natural attractions, the homestays for accommodation, visiting friends and families, and to pass through the area. There are numerous natural features that tourists can visit along the east coast route, such as Cherating, Marang and Kuala Terengganu. The study also believes that the designated route possesses many attractions like the traditional villages, the scenic views and local food that make it attractive.

An Overview of the Significant Coastal Landscape Characters for Tourism Route Planning

This section discusses the results obtained from the questionnaire survey on the significance of coastal landscape character for tourism route planning. The criteria listed for this section are, 1) rural culture, 2) recreational activities, 3) traditional architecture, 4) agriculture, 5) natural and landscape features, 6) history and heritage, 7) sensory and experience, 8) accessibility and 9) infrastructures available along the coastal route of Gebeng to Kuala Terengganu. Each of these criteria is scored by locals and tourists based on their significance.

Significant Criteria for Coastal Landscape Characters

The significance of each criterion is scored based on a 10-point Likert scale, and compared using their means. Recreational activities have been chosen by the respondents as the most important criteria for the coastal landscape settings (mean = 8.12), followed by infrastructures (mean = 7.96), accessibility (mean = 7.80), rural culture and traditional architecture (mean = 7.68 and mean = 7.48 respectively) (refer Table 1).

Table 1 Mean scores on the significance of criteria for coastal landscape characters

Overall Criteria	Locals	Tourists	Total
Rural Culture	**8.06**	**7.55**	**7.68**
Recreational Activities	**8.14**	**8.11**	**8.12**
Traditional Architecture	**7.59**	**7.44**	**7.48**
Agriculture	7.06	6.93	6.96
Natural and Landscape Features	7.51	7.03	7.15
History and Heritage	7.14	7.00	7.04
Sensory and Experience	7.71	7.38	7.46
Accessibility	**7.94**	**7.75**	**7.80**
Infrastructures	**7.98**	**7.95**	**7.96**

It can be deduced that recreational activities are the most critical feature in the point of view of the locals and tourists to conduct passive and active recreation. The presence of various landscape characters with different forms of waterbodies encourages tourists to engage with extreme sports, edutourism, rural tourism, and ecotourism activities provided along the coastal route. Secondly are the presence of infrastructures. The availability of infrastructures is crucial so that the locals and

tourists can fully enjoy and optimise the trip activities and time to accommodate their travel needs. Toilets, praying area, food courts and parking lots are the example of necessities that need to be upgraded from time to time to ensure tourists' satisfaction when visiting the rural areas. The third significant criterion is accessibility, as the tourists need to access the attractions conveniently, whether they are in the rural area or at the coastal area. Easy access to excellent facilities and amenities is essential for tourists; thus, the authorities need to provide better accessibility to ensure safety and the wellbeing of the tourists and the residents. The next important criterion for the coastal landscape characters is the rural culture. Rural culture of the east coast primarily encompasses the local peoples' lifestyles, which are the fishery activities, making traditional foods, playing traditional games, crafting traditional products such as batik paintings that have been passed down from generation to generation. These features not only can generate the income of the local people, but they are also vital to attracting international tourists who are interested to learn about the heritage of the east coast states. The knowledgeable figures who excel in playing traditional games or traditional foods especially in east coast should be highlighted and recognised in accordance to the National Rural Physical Planning Policy 2030 through WAKOH (Warisan Kebangsaan Orang Hidup) under National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645).

The other prominent landscape criterion chosen by the tourists is the traditional architecture of rural settings. Wooden village houses with beautiful rural background reflect the way of life of the residents, and it can be used to promote the local attractions along with the segments. The traditional rural houses also can be considered as living artefacts or museum. For example, the houses can be preserved and protected to ensure the products of the past can be remembered and known not only to local visitors but also people from other countries. This notion is parallel with the effort initiated by the government through the National Rural Physical Planning Policy 2030, which is to gazette traditional houses that possess historical, architectural and high cultural essence under the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) or the State Enactment. Apart from the five criteria discussed above, Table 1 also shows the least significant coastal landscape characters that were scored by the locals and tourists, which are the sensory and experience (mean = 7.46), natural and landscape features (mean = 7.15), history and heritage (mean = 7.04) and agriculture (mean = 6.94). These criteria are only less significant when compared to the other five criteria. However, all criteria were scored above the neutral mean, which shows that the nine criteria are relatively significant and essential to the locals and tourists. The sensory and experiences gathered by the locals and the tourists while travelling along the segment are varied. The locals and tourists engaged with various senses, such as smell and hearing, when visiting the attractions along the route. For example, the smell of the sea and the sounds of gushing sea waves hitting the beaches make the coastal area distinctive from other types of landscape. The study also believes that the lack of historical attractions and agriculture areas along the route make these two landscape characters less significant compared to others.

The Potentials of Gebeng – Kuala Terengganu Coastal Tourism Route
Apart from assessing the significance of coastal landscape characters, the study investigated the respondents' view on the potential of the Gebeng – Kuala Terengganu route as a coastal tourism route in Peninsular Malaysia. There are three main queries that the study probed the respondents, which are, 1) whether they would reuse the route for travelling purpose, 2) whether they would suggest to other people to use the route for travelling purpose, and 3) whether the route has potential as tourism route. The study uses a 10-point Likert scale to identify the visitor's opinions on the tourism route. The scale ranges from "strongly disagree" (Scale 1) to "strongly agree" (Scale 10) to determine the users' responses. Based on the result indicated in Fig. 2, 38.5% of the respondents

moderately agree that they would reuse the route for travelling purpose, while the 19.5% mildly agree that they would reuse the coastal route for travelling. The study predicted that there are several factors that could lead to these results. The respondents are mostly first-time tourists to the area, while the locals are mostly visitors who reside along the route. Thus, they preferred to use the route to travel to their relatives' houses or to go to work. 13% of the respondents agree, and 5.5% of respondents strongly agree that they would reuse the route for travelling purpose. The study believes that the availability of excellent infrastructures, continuous maintenance on road-related infrastructures and attractive tourist spots could encourage the tourists to revisit the area and to use the rural coastal route. Furthermore, the significant criteria of coastal route characters, including the scenic driving, various recreational sources, the abundance of vegetation types and excellent infrastructures could be the pull factors for the revisits.
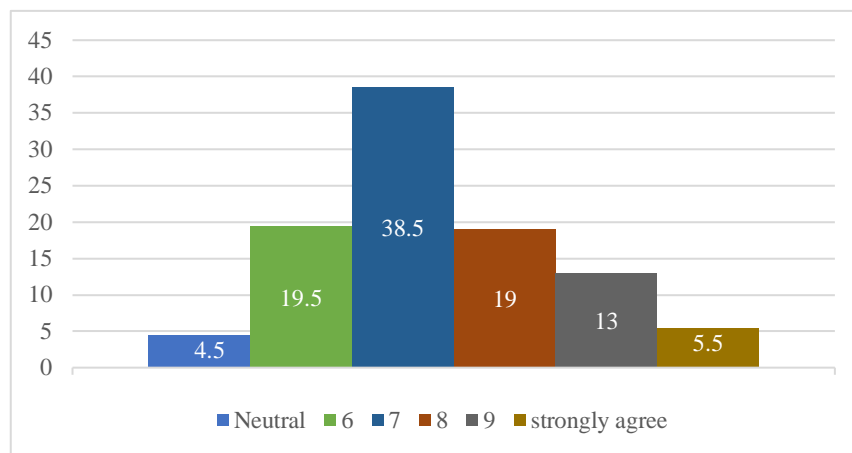

Fig. 2 Re-use the route for travelling purpose

Fig. 3 shows that 58 out of 200 respondents (29%) moderately agree to suggest using the route for travelling purpose. The role of authority to promote the coastal route is exceptionally crucial to boost the local economy along the road. 25.5% of the respondents agree to suggest the usage of the coastal route to their acquaintances. They would come again and enjoy the tourist attractions offered along the way. The abundance of natural resources, characteristics of the built environment and cultural settings could attract more tourists to come and use the coastal route to travel. 4% of the respondents strongly agree that they would suggest the route to be used to visit the tourist attractions.
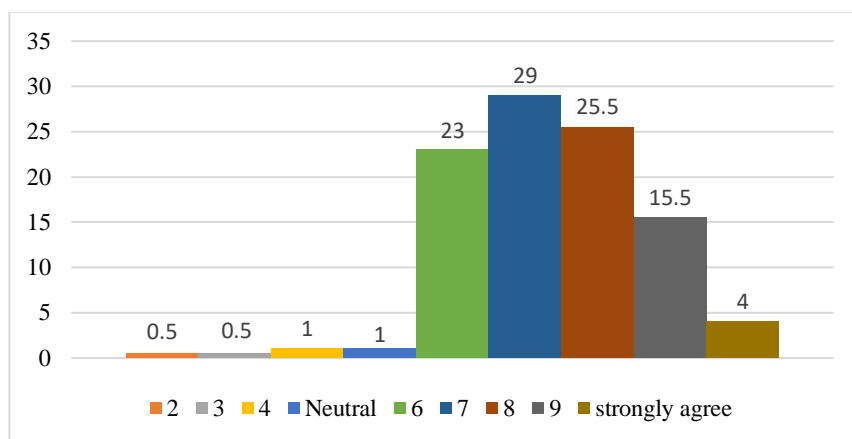

Fig. 3 Promote to others to use the route

Even though the percentage is quite low, it could be a starting point for the local authority, local community and travel operators to work together to develop and beautify the coastal route as a tourism route that can be revisited and suggested by the users and visitors, especially the driving tourists. The respondents were also asked about their experience while passing through the coastal route. Fig. 4 shows that 32.5% of the respondents moderately agree that the Gebeng – Kuala Terengganu route has potential as a tourism route. This is probably due to the good road condition and its infrastructure such as the provision of directional signage, the number and quality of tourist attractions that can be seen along and the accessibility to visit the attractions. 52 of 200 respondents, which are about 25% of the total respondents, agree that the coastal route has potential as a tourism route. The study believes that proper planning, promotion of activities and improvement on the infrastructures could increase the potentials of the route as a tourism route. 6% of the locals and tourists strongly agree that the route has the potential to be developed as a tourism route. The connectivity and myriad of tourism resources are important factors for prospective tourism growth in rural areas.
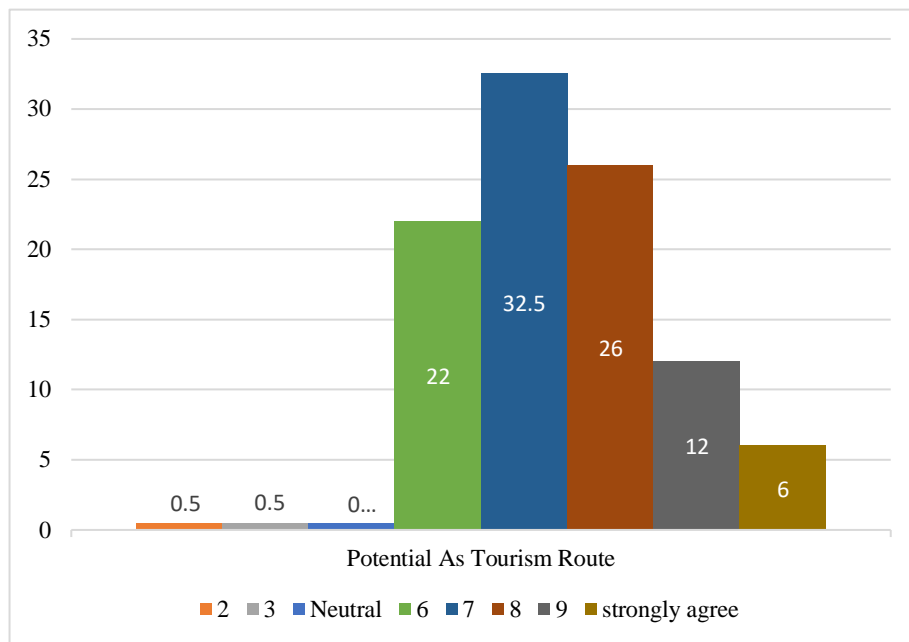

Fig. 4 Potential Gebeng – Kuala Terengganu route as a tourism route

CONCLUSION
The rural area and the coastal area are shaped by a myriad of natural, built and cultural landscape characters. The combination of the physiographic characters and the living landscapes make the rural route along the coastal area a unique attraction. This study has revealed that the coastal route has potentials to become a tourism route, making it an attraction itself for the east coast region. The significant landscape characters were found to be relevant to both locals and tourists. These characters need to be integrated and enhanced to ensure that tourists can have an enjoyable journey, while the sense of place for the locals are reinforced and sustained. The enhancements of the rural landscape characters and rural attractions are necessary to produce holistic tourism planning which is significant in sustaining the tourism industry as well as developing the rural economy.

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