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## Accessibility in Buildings of Tourist Attraction: A case studies comparison

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### Abstract

This study assessed the accessibility of three public buildings of tourist attraction in Malaysia; Berjaya Times Square, Museum of History and Ethnography Malacca (Stadthuys), and Central Market Kuala Lumpur. With the Malaysian government promotion of a caring society, buildings of tourist attraction should be accessible to the person with disabilities (PWD). Both exterior and interior spaces of these buildings should be able to cater the need of PWDs. Site observation, facilities simulation done by PWDs, and interviews were conducted to assess the buildings' accessibility. From the findings, buildings that have been built earlier are less accessible than the newer buildings.

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*Keywords:* Accessibility; person with disabilities; tourist attraction; public buildings

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### 1. Introduction

According to the population statistics by World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that about ten percents of world population, or 650 million persons, are from the disabled group of people (UN Enable, 2011). In Malaysia, the number of PWDs is expected to increase over the years due to the increase of human life span and higher rate of traffic and industrial accident (Department of Social

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Welfare, 2006). With the Malaysian government promotion of a caring society, buildings of tourist attraction such as museum, business centre and craft market should be accessible to everyone especially to the PWDs. Many studies of accessibility and audit access have been conducted in Malaysia. However, more studies, which focus on the accessibility in tourism, need to be conducted in order to attract more tourists to the country and generate higher country's income. Thus, this study is conducted to determine the level of accessibility for PWD in three public buildings of tourist attraction in Malaysia; Berjaya Times Square Kuala Lumpur, Museum of History and Ethnography Malacca (Stadthuys), and Central Market Kuala Lumpur. The research objectives include; to assess the accessibility level of public buildings that are regularly visited by tourists; to identify the categories of PWDs who have greater difficulties in using certain facilities; and to examine the areas in the buildings of tourist attraction that need to be upgraded in order to provide better accessibility for all visitors.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Disability and Inaccessible Built Environment*

The Malaysian PWD Act 2007 defines disabled people as "persons with physical, mental and intellectual disabilities that hindered them from fully participating in a normal way in the community way of life" (Bernama, 2009). Many scholars establish that the inaccessible environment may affect the well being of disabled people negatively (Putnam, Greenen, Powers, Saxton, Finney and Dautel, 2003; Darcy and Harris, 2003). Barriers in architecture hinder PWDs from getting in and out of the buildings and cause difficulties while using the facilities provided in the buildings. The inaccessible environment may also cause vulnerable stress, low self-esteem, and discomfort to the disabled people while they are in the public (O'Hara, 2004; Iwasaki and Mactavish, 2005). Thus, public buildings should be built with barrier-free design as it encourages integration and free access through secure and practical plan that can be used by all people including those who have visual or hearing impairment, parents who bring baby stroller, wheelchair users, and the elderly. With convenient accessibility, disabled people may involve and participate in the social and economic mainstreams without feeling being left out or discriminated.

### *2.2. Accessibility in Tourism*

One of the important public spaces which are regularly visited by many people is the building of tourist attraction. Buildings of tourist attraction should be able to cater the need of all types of people especially the PWDs because a friendly environment can attract more tourists of diverse age and background to the country, and, therefore, increase the country's income (Global Design Educators Online News, 2004). In the case of buildings of tourist attraction, it is recognized that some buildings have heritage value that needed to be protected. For example, Central Market was built during the British occupation of Malaysia with the Art Deco style of architecture which is hard to find in Malaysia (Central Market, 2011). Similarly, the Stadthuys building is located in Malacca, the Malaysian historical city which has been proclaimed by UNESCO as a heritage site (Wikipedia, 2011). Therefore, any renovations for better PWD access in these buildings should consider the heritage value of the existing structure. Drastic renovation to the buildings that may revoke their status as world heritage site should be avoided (Jason and Gomathy, 2008).

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