

**ASSESSING THE VISUAL QUALITY OF THE RAINFOREST TRAIL
AT PENANG BOTANICAL GARDEN**

BY :

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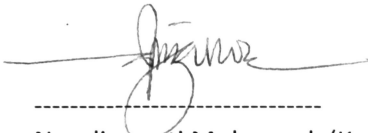
**PENGESAHAN PENYERAHAN LAPORAN PENYELIDIKAN DANA KECEMERLANGAN BERTAJUK
'ASSESSING THE VISUAL QUALITY OF THE RAINFOREST TRAIL AT PENANG BOTANICAL GARDEN'**

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5. Report

5.1 Proposed Executive Summary

Gardens are positive elements of our urban environment and landscape. They are created to preserve existing vegetation and for enhancing the natural environment besides bring the benefits for human emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically. And today, the numbers of restoration and implementation for garden in urban area in Malaysia have increased in variety of types such as the botanical garden. As referred to National Landscape Department, a high number of Botanical Garden is being developed in Malaysia such as in Johor, Selangor, Perak and Terengganu. This future planning received a positive feedback by the public and experts. According to its achievements and contributions, therefore, the Penang Botanical Garden is officially taken as good example of successful Botanical Garden in Malaysia. However, a forum on Penang Botanical Garden 2008 highlighted that the current development is being undertaken without any reference to the 1989 Botanical Development Master Plan thus the ignorance of this particular aspect would result to incoherent garden appearance. It is strongly believed that developing a Botanical Garden is not just improving the urban ecosystem and preserves the environment, it is also about visitor's satisfaction and perceptions towards the visual quality of the garden. Therefore, research on visual quality assessment in Penang Botanical Garden is very important to be made as part of restructuring process of the garden.

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5.3 Introduction

Over the years, Penang has lost a great deal of its natural heritage and landscape visual quality. Nevertheless, there are still pockets of undisturbed natural beauty in the island such as the Rainforest Trail. The Penang Botanical Garden was established by the British in 1884. Under the leadership of the Garden's first superintendent, Charles Curtis, a granite quarry was transformed into a great botanical and horticulture garden. The diverse objectives of the garden included conservation, recreation, education, research, tourism and services (Department of Penang Botanical Garden, 2010). Statistics show that over two thousand visitors annually visited the Rainforest Trail thus making it as one of the most visited destinations in Penang (Department of Penang Botanical Garden, 2010). However, popular natural rainforest trails face visual degradation. This situation can be seen in the Botanical Garden and along the Rainforest Trail where the landscape visual quality had changed over time. According to Malaysian Nature Society, the visual degradation of natural rainforest trails happened because more and more people have visited these places to enjoy nature and thus this automatically puts pressure on the environment and its visual impact.

According to previous forum of Penang Botanical Garden in year 2008, matters that might indirectly influenced the landscape visuals around the garden included inappropriate master plan and limited financial resources for the garden's maintenance. A close discussion between the first researcher and the Committee of Penang Botanical Garden during Natural Heritage Program on 17 April 2010 indicated that the Garden is still facing the same visual issues and the team is now earnestly looking for solutions. Visual quality is very important.. According to Matsuoka and Kaplan (2007), the study of visual quality had been explored by many researchers over the decades using the case study approach. Among the studies were at the botanical gardens and parks (Jim and Chen, 2006; Oguz, 2000; Ozguner and Kendle, 2006), greenways (Gobster, 1995), streetscapes (Sullivan and Lovell, 2006; Todorova et al., 2004) and neighborhoods (Berg, 2004; Crow et al., 2006; Kaplan and Austin, 2004; Vogt and Marans, 2004). These studies conclude that people gave highly aesthetic responses to landscape that is associated with natural elements. Yet some findings stated that people responded very well to urban and suburban environment that had unique, beautiful and well maintained landscape.

Over the years, studies on visual quality have formulated a different approach whereby the relationship between human nature and visual quality is taken into consideration. Demographic variables have been show to be related with people's preferences and perceptions towards the visual quality. These demographic variables include gender (Cohen et al., 2007; Todorova et al., 2004), age (Noralizawati, 2009), ethnic (Noriah, 2004; Wood, 1991), previous experience (Noralizawati, 2009; Ozguner and Kendle, 2006), familiarity