

Malacca Beach: Social and Environmental Implications of Design

By Antonio Recamier

A call to designers and engineers to take up social and environmental impact in their designs - especially when it comes to off-shore resource extraction.



Such a great feeling to drive up to the seashore; you travel for hours, anxious to catch the first glimpse of its vastness before anyone else. Then you notice the beach, a paradise for your

feet, tired of the darkness brought on by wearing shoes every day. Imagine you walk up to it, with a smile across your face, ripping off your clothes with every step, one by one, leaving only your bathing suit and your naked feet which start to tingle and warm up as they come in contact with the sand.

As for me, this feeling of freedom and purity takes me back to infancy, when I carelessly wandered around the sandy shores. But not this time...

About a four hour drive from Singapore, in the south Malaysian coast lays the beautiful town of Malacca. A former Portuguese port, the city currently receives foreign tourists as they marvel at the mixture of Chinese and European architecture, traditions and cuisine. The streets are filled by market stands offering fresh fruit, vegetables and juices, local snacks, clothing and accessories, electronics, toys, and just about anything you can expect from a good-old Chinese market. At night, the lit up alleys guide you through a stream of succulent restaurants, laid-back bars with live music, and even a couple of dance clubs. On our second day in Malacca the group was craving for a visit to the beach, relaxing under the sun and going for a swim.



Malacca, Malaysia, a World-Heritage City.

A supposed 40-minute ride north of Malacca on a local bus brought us to a simple beach, complete with food court by the entrance and few tourists. Thus it seemed like the perfect place to relax! But by the third barefoot step on the sand it felt that I had stepped on

something, maybe a rock or some debris. I shook it off, yet after another two steps again the object found my foot. Finally I caught the glimpse of something dark, thick, and pungent creeping up my sole (of my right foot, of course, let's not get dramatic). A quick look around and it was discovered: this black intruder was crude oil. Almost everyone in the group had had the same appalling experience.

I then decided to take a closer look: mixing exploration and discovery with fitness, I ran along the coast to find someone that could provide answers. Local fishermen responded with blank faces as I tried to ask questions, until one that understood and spoke a pinch of English confirmed our suspicions. The oil came from extraction platforms off the coast, and had been seen at the beach for a few years. Young soldiers from a military post on the beach confirmed the fishermen's tales, and it became clear that this beautiful place was stained with not only oil but the neglect of government officials, tourism agencies, environmental associations, and worse: the local inhabitants.

Despite the calm sea, it was clear that none of the group was having a comfortable time on the beach. While having lunch, most were complaining about the fact that it seemed as this beach had not been taken care of in a long time. The incident is definitely a wakeup call for engineers and designers to devise ways of cleaning up the current mess or avoiding it completely. New technologies must focus on creating new ways of harnessing and using energy. Products must steer users towards a more conscious use and disposal. To take care of the integrity of our environment means taking care of us.



Not the kind of oil you'd like to rub on your feet: a clump of crude oil found on Malacca Beach.

-
- This article was written as part of the development of a product innovation research project for the Southeast Asian market, during my last year of study at Delft University of Technology in 2010. The research project included a trip to Malaysia and Singapore to investigate the hospital markets for a European company with the purpose of detecting major trends and advising on innovation and product adjustments according to unmet user needs.
 - Photo description: the first photo was taken upon arriving to the beach (notice the small black stone-like debris: this is the crude oil crumpled together); the second photo is a closer look at these clumps of oil recovered at the scene as evidence.

FOROALFA

<https://foroalfa.org/en/articles/malacca-beach-social-and-environmental-implications-of-design>

