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Roaring into 2020

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DEVELOPING

*TOWARDS
YOUR DREAM*



COMING SOON

Water Villa

@ MELAKA



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 her heart is

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Editorial Note

How time flies as we find ourselves in a brand new decade. As we leave behind the shadows of our past, however, our quest for the good life survives as an enduring aspiration for the future.

Subscribing to the belief that a life lived responsibly and fully is a life lived well, *Live! 2020* brings you a delectable feast of information to satiate your senses and perhaps even to unlock a few doors which you may not previously have opened. Focusing on places, spaces, faces and trends, *Live! 2020* shines a light on various elements that capture the quintessential Malaysian spirit of fun, whilst also doffing our caps to the incremental growth of sustainable practices.

Blessed with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, beautiful locations, as well as inspiring and enterprising citizens, Malaysians from all walks of life can make connections, seek adventures and experience new things in our very own backyard. In fact, our

stories will reveal just how easy it is to access an alluring world of charms. While this issue merely scratches the surface of what Malaysia has to offer, we hope that it will inspire you to carve out a bit more time to explore and discover some wonderful local treasures.

Join us as we take you on a whirlwind tour of the following:

SPACES & PLACES — because we all need places for rest and relaxation. From less frequented and glamorous vacay-spots, or picturesque retreats that pay homage to vernacular architecture, to charming cafes and drinking spots, we bring you a worthy selection of cool spaces in which to hang out.

ESSENCE — where the arts and culture take centre stage. We are especially delighted to feature the gifts of a few savant artists, whose remarkable works so beautifully articulate their hopes and messages.

TASTE — because the thrill of the chase for “good” food is wired into the DNA of every true-blooded Malaysian. Learn about the healthy and trendy farm-to-table dining options that have emerged over the horizons of our culinary landscape, as well as scrumptious treats that marry the familiar with the exotic, to yield desserts that are simply divine.

PERSONALITIES — because there are many inspirational Malaysians, from everyday heroes to globally renowned names, who make great role models and ambassadors. In this issue, we are pleased to let you in on our tête-à-têtes with squash queen Nicol David, culinary icon Chef Wan, and international music artiste Zee Avi.

As we look ahead to the new decade, let us aspire to make more time for ourselves and to cultivate a more wholesome lifestyle that celebrates living well. Let’s laugh, love and live! ●

On the cover

*Use a fork, use a knife,
or use chopsticks if you like,
so dig in now, look inside,
it’s all about living life!*



A modern rendition of the Malaysian Rojak dish at Flock at W Kuala Lumpur (see page 26).

PHOTO: FLOCK AT W KUALA LUMPUR

Get in touch with us!
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ARA SENDAYAN

A SENSE ABOVE

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Welcome to an abode of uplifting serenity at Ara Sendayan, a 194-acre hilltop enclave of beautiful homes located just minutes from Seremban.

This collection of contemporary residences provides residents and their families with the best qualities of Ara Sendayan's hilltop locale, while remaining within easy reach of conveniences, amenities, facilities, and other such daily essentials.

When the working day is done, locals have a place for rest and recreation in the d'Tempat Country Club, which is the largest clubhouse of its kind in Seremban. Placed just a walk away from the residences, it offers access to all residents and their guests.

A total of 12 indoor facilities are available at the d'Tempat Country Club, with something for everyone in the family. Headlining its list of attractions is an Olympic size swimming pool, tennis courts, badminton courts, banquet rooms, a wellness spa, gym, a 10-lane bowling alley known as The Sphere, and many more.

For thrill seekers who like their activities with a little more adrenaline-pumping action, the X-Park Sendayan motorised sports theme park is also located within the development.

And that's not all. The conveniences continue with grocery stores and retail outlets nearby. The Columbia Asia Hospital is also mere minutes away for all healthcare needs, while the family's educational essentials can be well and truly catered to at the world-class Matrix Global Schools.

Venturing beyond Bandar Sri Sendayan is also made seamless, thanks to a wide network with links to the North-South Highway and other networks such as the Seremban-Port Dickson Highway and KLIA Linkage. The proposed Paroi-Senawang-KLIA Expressway would also enhance the enclave's connectivity.



Made For Families. Designed For Everyday Enrichment.

Following the success of its earlier phases, Ara Sendayan will be debuting its exclusive parcel offering double-storey semi-dees. Ervina, an exclusive collection of 46 hilltop residence provides a unique ambiance to each home, complete with a stunning view to behold. Starting from RM1,465,888 with bungalow sizeable layouts that combines living, dining and kitchen area this will be an unrivalled Residence above it all. The homes are designed to suit multigenerational living with the entrance, living and dining areas and guest bedroom on the ground floor designed to meet the needs of the elderly.

Ervina, feature large built-up areas, allowing flexibility in the usage of interior spaces. The homes are designed with large windows for abundant natural lighting, walk in wardrobe space, and master bathroom with bathtub for you to relax after a long hectic day.

Living up to its name, Ervina offers more than meets the eye with state-of-the-art facilities on top of its picturesque sceneries that thrives in a vibrant community via carefully crafted amenities such as an outdoor gym, barbeque pit, children's playground and an amphitheater area for events, thoughtfully made for a life well lived. Up here, residents able to enjoy a life of holistic fulfilment with loved ones with myriad of facilities such as outdoor gym, BBQ pits, amphitheater, playgrounds, gazebo and sunken seating within this gated and guarded neighbourhood.

To discover more on what is Ervina is all about, register your interest with us at www.arasendayan.com.my or call us at **1800 88 2688**.



For more information, please contact
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Ara Sendayan

Wisma Matrix, No. 57 Jalan Tun Dr. Ismail
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matrixconcepts



Clean yourself up!

Sustainable personal care shopping

Text **Vanessa Surian**
 Photos **Low Yen Yeing**

ALL THE PLASTIC that has ever been made still exists on earth, somewhere. Our trash overflows from our landfills and clogs up the seas, causing mounting problems for people and the world at large.

If you've been wanting to free yourself of single-use plastics, then overhaul the selection of personal care products you use in your daily ablutions to live a more sustainable life with less waste. You can start by giving your lifestyle a personal care makeover — by aiming to shop zero waste and by using products that are free of harmful ingredients. It's not just better for the planet, but also for you.



Bar soaps and lotions are brilliant choices of zero-waste products, as the main difference between bars and the liquid version is simply the addition of water. So not only is it much simpler and less messy (you can't spill a bar of soap!) to pack for travel, you also get more bang for your buck.

Ghar soap (or Aleppo soap): RM35 — An ancient soap that is 100% handmade in a process that takes one year, it comprises just two ingredients: olive oil and laurel oil. This gentle, moisturising bar of soap is a minimalist's dream, as it can be used as a hand and body wash, shampoo, facial cleanser, face mask, makeup remover, shaving cream and toothpaste... and it can even be used to wash dishes and laundry

Kindersoaps
Clarity: RM21 — Suitable for oily and acne-prone skin, this beautiful bar of soap contains the healing benefits of eucalyptus essential oil, activated carbon and french green clay



Be Good,
face scrub:
 RM15/30g jar or buy it loose/refill for RM4.50/10g



The Mineraw: RM30 to RM50 — A collection of travel-size toiletries

Continues on Page 10 →

REDEFINING OUR PINNACLE, AGAIN

By relentlessly pursuing distinction, we build because we dare. KL Eco City is an ambitious project and the first-of-its-kind for us as we envisioned constructing a city within a city.

It is bold, daring and an achievement.

We are now the first-ever Malaysian property developer to win the FIABCI Malaysia Property Awards for the 12th time, affirming the higher we aspire, the greater our recognition.

We are indeed proud of this honour – inspiring us never to limit our imagination as ingenuity and innovation will always follow.

Thank you all for your support.



KL Eco City, Bangsar

2019 FIABCI Malaysia Property Awards
Office Category



Clean yourself up!



Horsehair toothbrush: RM25;
Frangipani solid toothpaste: RM25 (refill: RM15); **tooth powder (100g):** RM38; **dental floss:** RM17 (refill: RM12)

A toothbrush with a wooden handle and horsehair bristles is fully compostable, and will break down much easier once it reaches the end of its time with you, while the refillable tooth powder or solid toothpaste will keep you, your dentist and the earth smiling

← From Page 8

Kindersoaps Summer Fizz: RM21 — For dry tired skin, it imparts a refreshing rosemary, sweet orange and peppermint smell, and is made with mineral-rich clays to nourish the skin; **The Clean Attempt shampoo bar:** RM42 — Made from lavender and geranium; **Loofah:** RM5



The Clean Attempt lotion bar: RM30; refill RM28 — Made from cocoa butter, coconut oil and beeswax with the soothing scent of geranium and lavender, this luxurious lotion bar can also be used as a lip balm



The Mineraw Glow serum: RM100; **The Mineraw toner:** RM35; **Earth Care essential oils and essential oil blends:** RM2.80 to RM5.50/g; **The Mineraw beard oil:** RM50



Glass bottles: RM3.00 to RM4.50

All products can be found at **NUDE the Zero Waste Store**. 11A, Jalan 19/29, Seksyen 19, Petaling Jaya, Selangor. Every product that is sold in containers can be refilled at the store (charged by weight). Containers can also be returned and sanitised for reuse.

A Sound Masterplan Creates Value.

As a town-maker, we apply mindful planning principles to make a town that works. Like how we place our villas along the waterfront and surround them with canals and lush greenery.

To move around seamlessly, we not only lay bicycle paths to each neighbourhood but also canals and waterways to link the homes to the village square.

It is our way of looking at the details to get the places right. It is about creating a lifestyle and connecting the community.



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Foreign fare made local



PHOTOS: HARRISTON

It is safe to say that Malaysians love their food. We are guilty of eating, discussing, ruminating over and fantasising about food at all hours of the day and night. Amongst us, though, there are “ultra-foodies” who have taken it to another level by concocting their own culinary masterpieces to embellish our gastronomic landscape with a touch of flair and a generous serving of “yum”! Allow us to acquaint you with a group of artisanal epicureans who have added a uniquely Malaysian twist to some foreign staples.

Text **Shawn Ng**

Chocolatier extraordinaire

— *Harriston*



Above (left) and facing page: Harriston chocolates are made from the finest cocoa beans using a mixture of both in-house developed and traditional recipes, offering 150 unique options infused with tropical fruits, herbs and spices

Above (right): Ruby Chocolate is made from the naturally pink ruby cocoa bean which creates a creamy, slightly sour chocolate with an aromatic hint of berry fruitiness, providing a balanced flavour that is neither too sour nor too sweet

MALAYSIAN CHOCOLATIER Harriston serves up over 10 million chocolates to customers worldwide. It takes special pride in infusing Malaysian flavours into its chocolate creations especially with its successful exotic range of Durian and Tongkat Ali chocolates which have turned out to be among the brand's bestselling chocolates.

Harriston is also the first to distribute the industry-changing ruby chocolate in Southeast Asia, dubbed as the world's fourth type of chocolate after dark, milk and white chocolate, in collaboration with world-leading chocolate manufacturer Barry Callebaut.

Today, the company offers 150 chocolate variants that can be obtained through Harriston Signature, its flagship stores in Taman Shamelin Perkasa in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur and in Georgetown, Penang.

Harriston Boutique, an abbreviated version of the flagship stores, can be found at Gohtong Jaya, Genting Highlands and at the Malaysian Tourism Centre (MaTIC), Ampang in KL while Harriston Chocolatier, the latest addition to the family boasting unique and delicious pralines, is located at The LINC KL at Jalan Tun Razak.

The largest homegrown chocolate maker in Malaysia was founded in 2005 by local entrepreneur SC Teng, who has loved

chocolates since he was a child and realised from a young age that chocolates make people smile.

The brand Harriston was inspired by George Harrison, famed guitarist from The Beatles, whom Teng is a huge fan of. Fuelled with passion and enthusiasm, he decided to name the company after something or someone that inspires him, and instead of naming the company Harrison, he took the letter "T" from Teng and coined "Harriston".

Harriston is now managed by the second generation of the Teng family — Queenie and Wei Tzyy, who are determined to carry on the heritage and dream.

Committed in sharing the joy and magic of chocolates with the rest of the world, the chocolatier plans on expanding to more outlets in Southeast Asia and Asia. They hope to one day become a recognisable international brand.

Harriston Chocolatier
Lot 1/10 & 1/11, The LINC,
360 Jalan Tun Razak, Taman U Thant,
50400 Kuala Lumpur
T: +603 7490 7722
E: general@harristonchocolate.com
www.harristonchocolate.com

A cheesy affair

— Milky Whey Cheese

IF YOU ARE a cheese aficionado, then you definitely must try out the gems produced locally by Milky Whey Cheese.

With a cheese room tucked away in Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur, Milky Whey Cheese uses local grass-fed Jersey cow milk and local ingredients to incorporate more Malaysianess into their 20 to 25 types of cheese and other dairy products, including butter and — when there is enough leftover butter — ghee.

Haloumi, Tomme, Gouda, Brie and Blue Cheese are among its bestsellers, but Annisa Iwan, chief cheesemaker and founder of Milky Whey Cheese says her favourite is Tembaga, a washed-rind semi-soft cheese that she modified from French Reblochon and Kunyit — a hard cheese with turmeric and Sarawak pepper which she had produced in the past.

What prompted Annisa to make her own cheese? Well, she simply loves eating it. “Making my own cheese came from necessity, as I love eating cheese, and eight years back, it was not very easy to get good quality cheese where I lived in Indonesia,” she says.

She started her cheese-making journey with plenty of reading and research, and understandably, there were many failed experiments in the beginning. Annisa finally succeeded with lots of practice and help from experienced cheese makers.

Her first attempt in selling her homemade cheese was in October 2016 when she set up a booth at an international school’s bazaar and to her surprise, everything was sold out within two hours.

This motivated her to produce and sell more cheese and about a year later, she established Milky Whey Cheese.

Eager to try their cheese? Check their social media platforms, including Instagram and Facebook to find out where their next pop-up store would be. Alternatively, you can visit their home cheese room in Desa Sri Hartamas by making appointments through WhatsApp and Facebook.

Milky Whey Cheese
T: +6016 622 0361
FB/IG: @milkywheycheese



Above: Using the freshest and finest ingredients, the cheese from Milky Whey Cheese are handmade in small batches and aged with care according to the requirements of each variety

Left: A cheese platter to satiate the tastebuds



PHOTOS: MILKY WHEY CHEESE

Mean and meaty

— Sausage KL



PHOTOS: SAUSAGE KL

Above (left): Every batch of their homemade Black Pudding sells like hot cakes

Above (right): Sausage KL offers some of the best homemade, handmade, preservative-free, junk-free real sausages, best eaten with their yummy scotch eggs (top right)

ABOUT THREE TO FOUR years ago, Matthew and Nova Kerr, who hail from England and Indonesia respectively, were looking around Kuala Lumpur for decent sausages that contain less fillers and preservatives, and with more meat but to no avail.

Hence, Nova decided to make her own at home — using a small machine bought online.

Though the machine was not very good, but the sausages made by Nova were great and received rave reviews from friends and family who loved them so much that they asked for more.

Thus inspired, the couple set up Sausage KL in 2016 and subsequently opened their first outlet at the Holiday Place Hotel lobby on Jalan Ampang, KL in 2018.

Sausage KL is proud of its homemade meat products including sausages with 100% natural casings and fresh meat. Among their most popular items are Lincolnshire, Bratwurst, Italian, Spicy Italian, Simply Sausage, Cajun Pork and Black Pudding.

The sausages are 97% meat with only a tiny bit of filler to help hold the meat together and of course, fresh herbs and spices. They are also all gluten-free, with the only exception being the Bratwurst which contains beer.

“We are also the only people who make Black Pudding (Blood Sausage) in KL. We have both the gluten-free and traditional varieties. Scotch eggs and sausage rolls are also firm favourites and are not easy to source elsewhere,” says Matthew.

In addition, the couple also makes chicken nuggets which are much more nutritious than most of the frozen ones available in the market.

These nuggets are the perfect way to sneak some veggies into your kid’s meal, as broccoli and carrot make up about a third of the ingredients, with the rest being chicken breast and cheddar cheese.

If you cannot make it to the outlet, Sausage KL offers home delivery service.

Sausage KL Cafe & Deli
G5, Holiday Place Hotel,
Jalan Ampang, Taman U Thant,
55000 Kuala Lumpur
T: +6017-605 6457
FB: @sausagekl
E: sausagekl@gmail.com
www.sausagekl.com

Smoking hot goodness

— Augustine Smokery

IT WAS ONE FINE Easter holiday when Henry Augustine Chuah, who was still a college student then, felt a great urge to pick up charcuterie and food-smoking.

At the time, he was studying finance at the University of Otago in New Zealand and had just learnt how to smoke fish from his flatmate's dad during that very Easter holiday.

“Consciously, I felt the compulsion to continue in the family tradition of making artisanal food. The last food artisan in my family was my uncle who was a *lap cheong* (Chinese sausage) artisan but he died when I was around 9 or 10 years old and so didn't get the chance to hand over the knowledge to me. But I do remember discussions on the process of preparing cured meats. And so, noticed the similarities between my family recipe and what was taught by my flatmate's dad,” he shares.

Once he got everything in place, Chuah started Augustine Smokery in 2012, offering a wide range of locally produced smoked-food.

There is hot smoked salmon which is a cooked smoked salmon variety, very popular in Europe and Canada; cold smoked salmon

with every batch requiring a painstaking seventy-two hours to process, smoked by a combination of fragrant woods sourced locally and overseas; smoked duck and chicken that cater to those who want something beyond fish, and also smoked salmon pate — a cream cheese-based pate with a strong flavour that can be used as a spread or in sauces.

Interestingly, Augustine Smokery and Malaysian cheese maker Milky Whey Cheese have joined hands to create their own signature smoked cheese and beef salami.

The two local artisans have made their first batch of sopressata and saucisson with live bacteria and mould imported from overseas and these are expected to be ready by early 2020.

Follow them on Facebook for the latest info and the local restaurants which use their products. You can also contact Chuah directly to place your order.

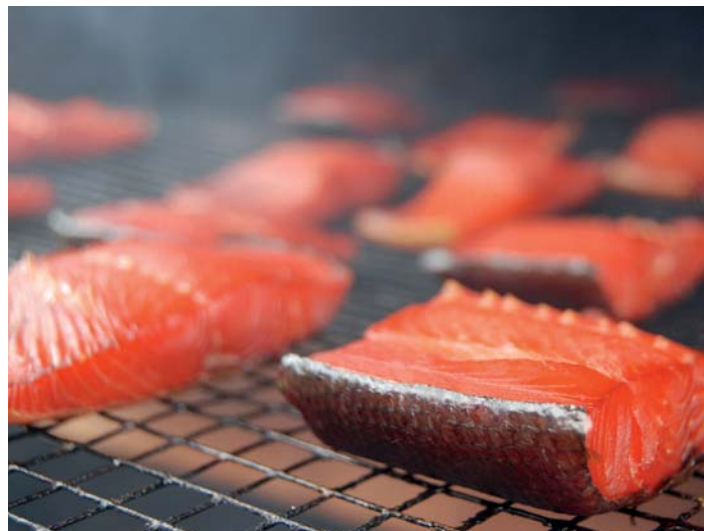
Augustine Smokery
T: +6011 1620 0149
E: augustinesmokery@gmail.com
FB: [@augustinesmokery](https://www.facebook.com/augustinesmokery)



Salmon pate is one of the bestsellers at Augustine Smokery which can also be found at Urbanfresh Grocers

Augustine Smokery's delicious smoked salmon is the result of great effort and deep passion

Far right: Every piece of salmon is cured with a salt mixture to reduce its water content before being smoked above carefully selected smouldering wood chips



PHOTOS: AUGUSTINE SMOKERY

Perfumed sweetness

— *Lavand*



Above (left): Lavand also carries a variety of fine chocolates made with Swiss Courveture to satisfy anyone with a sweet tooth

Above (right): Experience the explosion on your taste buds as you sink your teeth into Lavand's sumptuous baklavas



PHOTOS: LAVAND

LAVAND WAS FOUNDED purely on a passion for anything sumptuous — to be exact, the sublime feeling of biting into lush gourmet chocolates, or the explosion in your mouth as you sink your teeth into delectable baklavas.

The homegrown business started back in 2004 at Bangsar Shopping Centre in Kuala Lumpur where Sheerin Zalani introduced Lebanon-imported baklavas to the local market during the month of Ramadan.

“At the time, no one had heard of baklava but we found that there was a market for this sweet pastry. We presented the baklavas in beautiful packaging and did a lot of testing with the flavour profiles so that they would suit the local market,” she says. The result? They were a hit although baklavas were mostly unheard of in the country then.

Today, Lavand has gone from a two-table display of imported baklavas to an established bakery producing not only the

traditional confectionery that is able to rival those from the Middle East and the Mediterranean, but also a mouthwatering array of sweets and confections, such as petit fours, artisanal chocolates and almond dragee.

Lavand's baklavas are crispy, light and not overly sweet. These delicious treats are available at Lavand's outlets in Plaza Damansara and Bangsar Shopping Centre. ●

Lavand Pure Indulgence
46, Medan Setia 2,
Plaza Damansara,
Damansara Heights,
50490 Kuala Lumpur
T: +603 2095 5154
E: info@lavand.com.my
www.lavand.com.my

Contemporary desserts



PHOTOS: MADHATTER DESSERTS

For some, dessert completes a meal but for others, every dish before the sweet course is merely an appetiser! Whilst we can relate to the sentiment that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, there are always new and exciting ways of elevating the familiar flavours of conventional dessert recipes. So submit to your sweet cravings by trying these delectable treats conceived by local pastry chefs who have unquestionably upped the ante in the dominion of patisserie.

Text **Chelsey Poh**

with a Malaysian twist

Claypot Rice

RM25

Desserts do not have to be perennially sweet, and the Claypot Rice at MadHatter Desserts (picture on facing page) demonstrates this view. Instead of sweet, this dessert has a nutty roasty taste. At first sight, a puff of smoke escapes from underneath the lid of the claypot when it is opened, giving a magical effect and a light charcoal smoky aroma reminiscent of claypot rice which is traditionally cooked over charcoal.

In the concave, the starkly white-on-white concoction belies a myriad of flavours waiting to be unveiled.

The dessert is composed of rice milk and bamboo leaf sorbet, rice milk snow ice, chewy Job's tears tossed in coconut and glutinous rice pudding, rice milk jelly, rice crunches and bamboo leaf foam.

Rice milk is infused with bamboo leaves to give the sorbet a subtle *bak chang* (rice dumpling) taste. Although one may not be able to distinguish the bamboo leaf taste, as MadHatter Desserts owner, Marcus Low puts it "you could definitely tell that something is missing if it is not there". Most ingredients in the dessert are organic, except for the rice crunches.

It takes a long time (approximately 36 hours) to make this dessert, as the process includes soaking the rice and making the ice cream. Low tries to use local ingredients and for the Claypot Rice, he uses *Beras Adan* (white rice) from Sarawak to make the rice milk, and local Job's tears.

Exquisite
taste!



Bubur Cha Cha

RM23

This Bubur Cha Cha looks nothing like the *bubur cha cha* we are familiar with simply because it is a cake version encompassing the deconstructed flavours of the traditional sweet soup or *tong sui*.

The Bubur Cha Cha at MadHatter Desserts wowed the judges on reality cooking show *Masterchef Asia Season 1* in which Low emerged runner-up.

The top of the cake comprises *bubur cha cha* ice cream, coconut pearls (replicating sago) and pumpkin creme brulee with a crispy sugar shell all balanced on top of a sweet potato and yam genoise cake. The stack is accompanied by coconut gel (made of coconut and *agar-agar*) and *gula melaka* foam on the side to provide an asymmetrical look to this elaborate dessert.

The shiny white coconut pearls are made by dripping coconut *agar-agar* cream into cold oil to form small white spheres. Although the whole process is time-consuming, every step adds to the dish, be it in taste, texture, look and of course, love, says Low.

"There are enough portions of every single element in this dessert, for you to consider tasting everything separately, before eating them together," he adds.

MadHatter Desserts

19, Jalan SS 21/60, Damansara
Utama, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

T: +6012 370 4327

FB: @MadHatterDessertsKL

IG: @MadHatter_Desserts

Healthy cheesecakes



Black sesame tofu cheesecake

RM13

The tofu (bean curd) cheesecakes at Jöies Café are healthier options to the normal cheesecakes as they are considered low-sugar and low-calorie, but yummy all the same.

Adding tofu gives the cheesecake a smooth and light texture, as well as all the benefits of eating the protein-rich food including preventing obesity and improving skin condition.

There are 12 flavours of tofu cheesecakes to choose from, all using natural colouring from flowers, herbs and fruits.

For instance, the fragrant black sesame tofu cheesecake is perfectly balanced in flavour. Black sesame paste and a mixture of cream cheese and tofu are swirled together to create a beautiful spiral pattern. The cake has a very soft texture and a nice aroma of black sesame.

Jöies Café
1st floor 32, Jalan Moulmein,
10350 Penang
T: +604 226 0479
FB/IG: @joiescafe

Blue surf tofu cheesecake

RM13

Butterfly pea flowers are commonly used in Malaysia as a natural colouring in *nasi kerabu*, *nyonya kuih* or in drinks. It is said that it has properties that can improve memory, eyesight, hair growth and skin.

When added to the tofu cheesecake, it gives the cake a whimsical appearance and a fresh taste that is a delight for both the eyes and the palate. The layered cheesecake is decorated with the pretty flowers and sprinkled with chia seeds and orange peel.



PHOTOS: JÖIES SOURDOUGH CAFE

Roaring puffs

Milotabursaurus

RM12

They call their cream puffs “Creampuff-saurus”, and each flavour has its own unique dinosaur-like name. “We thought the outside of the choux looks like dinosaur skin and would be fun to name it along that theme,” says co-owner of the shop, Shafinaz.

Each dessert at Cake Jalan Tiung is crafted to appeal to the eye as well as the taste buds. Milotabursaurus, inspired by the popular Milo dinosaur drink from local mamak restaurants, offers a sweet and rich chocolate malt flavour with a surprising crunch from the Milo nuggets inside.

The rugged and macho-looking puff is filled with Milo patisserie cream, Milo paste and Milo nuggets topped with Milo mixed with condensed milk Chantilly cream.

A number of components need to be prepared before assembling the puffs. A choux paste and craquelin cookie mixture is baked for an hour, resulting in a crunchy texture outside, while the inside of each puff has to be properly dried out to create the right vessel for the filling, which is done a day before for it to set properly. The cream filling is then piped into the puffs before they go on to the shelf.



PHOTOS: LOW YEN YEING



Nangkasaurus

RM12

The delicate looking Nangkasaurus features a generous amount of filling made up of butterfly pea flower diplomat cream, chopped *nangka* (jack-fruit), lime juice and zest. The puff is then topped with coconut cream, white chocolate shards and garnished with a fresh butterfly pea flower plucked from the Jalan Tiung community garden.

Creampuffsauruses, like Nangkasaurus and Milotabursaurus, are available on rotation depending on the best ingredients available. Check out Cake Jalan Tiung’s Facebook page or Instagram for updates on what’s available that day.

Cake Jalan Tiung
31, Jalan Tengku Ampuan Zabedah
J 9/J, Seksyen 9,
40100 Shah Alam, Selangor
T: +6012 878 7258
FB/IG: @cakejalantiung

Cutie-pies

The Seal

RM19

This heart-melting ice cream dessert is an oxymoron of a burst of tropical flavours in the form of a seal.

Xiao-Ly Koh, the person behind Tanuki by Crustz says she wants to do her small part for the environment. “We want to remind our guests about animals that are affected by climate change. They are like our dessert melting in the heat,” she says.

The fuzzy surface on the outermost layer of The Seal is created using a chocolate velvet spray. The dessert is a combination of different textures; from the traditional homecooked pineapple chunks to the refreshing mango sorbet and the creamy coconut ice cream.

The main ingredients — coconut, mango and pineapple — are sourced locally. The shop tries to use Rompin or Melita pineapples which are considered the best locally-grown pineapples. The two variants not only have a consistent taste profile but also beget the desired soft texture after being cooked.

Tanuki by Crustz

26, Jalan Selera 1, Taman Bukit Indah,
58200 Kuala Lumpur
T: +6016 211 0932
FB/IG: @tanukibycrustz



PHOTO: TANUKI BY CRUSTZ



PHOTO: XIAO BY CRUSTZ

Layers of flavours

The Coconut

RM18

The Coconut at Xiao by Crustz is entirely edible from the “husk” of the coconut to the chocolate straw. The dessert is made of coconut mousse, banana passion fruit compote, a crunchy base made of coconut, and a coating of dark chocolate to imitate the coconut husk. Xiao by Crustz is another shop owned by Xiao-Ly Koh.

The highlight of its taste profile comes from the banana passion fruit compote that comprises local *pisang emas* which looks like a baby banana but provides a rich banana flavour and a smooth texture. The passion fruit, on the other hand, gives the compote a nice tangy bite and fragrance. It also helps to balance the sweetness and create a semi lava effect in the filling.

Meanwhile, the creamy coconut mousse is made from coconut puree that contains a mix of coconut milk and coconut water.

Xiao by Crustz

Happy Mansion, B-G-6, Section 17,
46400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.
T: +6016 211 0932
FB/IG: @xiaobycrustz

Natural and nostalgic

Black glutinous rice porridge with coconut ice cream

RM10.80

One spoonful of Cocopuri's traditional *bubur pulut hitam* and you'll be hooked. This warm smooth black glutinous rice porridge is served with a scoop of homemade coconut ice cream, one of its signature items. The ice cream is dairy-free and suitable for vegans. Combining warm and cold, the dessert is also topped with dried longan and a light drizzle of *gula apong* (palm sugar syrup) sauce.

"Cocopuri" means "coconut palace", a reflection of the founders' love for eating and making coconut ice cream. With a name that all Malaysians regardless of ethnicity find easy to relate to, Cocopuri reinvents traditional desserts to make them "cool" again, be it in the form of a single scoop of ice cream or ensembles that involve ice cream.

Keen on creating a nostalgic experience, the ice cream recipes are wholly original, created from much trial and error.



PHOTOS: COCOPURI



Pandan Kaya ice cream with coconut waffle

RM14.80

Inspired by the traditional kaya loved by Malaysians, the fragrant, flavourful and smooth Pandan Kaya ice cream is undoubtedly one of Cocopuri's most popular flavours.

This ice cream is handmade from 100% natural ingredients found in the local market. This ensures the highest quality of ingredients and is in line with Cocopuri's commitment to support local businesses. The delicious ice cream is also dairy-free and without artificial colouring.

However, the Pandan Kaya ice cream is only served on special occasions. Keep an eye on Cocopuri's Facebook page and Instagram to check for availability. The scrumptious ice cream comes on its own (RM8.80), or on a toasted bun (RM10.80), or with a homemade coconut waffle with extra house kaya spread on the side (RM14.80).

Cocopuri
Ground Floor, Sub Lot 4,
Block A Emporium Kuching,
Jalan Tun Jugah,
93350 Kuching, Sarawak
T: +6016 833 4264
FB/IG: @cocopuridesserts



PHOTO: MY PIZZA LAB

Next level Boba craze

Cempedak Boba Pizza

RM25

Merging flavours from the East and West, the Cempedak Boba Pizza has a base made of My Pizza Lab's signature pizza dough, topped with fresh cempedak puree, chewy brown sugar boba pearls and mozzarella cheese.

The signature pizza dough is mixed with herbs and sundried tomatoes before it is baked into a light and crispy crust that could be enjoyed even on its own.

Tasting both sweet and savoury at the same time, no cempedak fruit lover will be able to resist this dessert pizza which is available most of the time unless cempedak is in short supply, which happens occasionally. Do check My Pizza Lab's social media for announcements before hunting down this pizza.

My Pizza Lab
12, Jalan 21/22, Sea Park,
46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
FB/IG: @myPizzaLab

Naughty or nice?

Onde-Onde Cake / Onde-Onde Mini Cake

RM15 / RM7

One of the latest cafes in the Klang Valley, Daun KL has come up with its own version of the Onde-Onde Cake which stays true to the *onde-onde* kuih profile. Heavily covered in fresh desiccated coconut, the Onde-Onde Cake reveals delightful layers when sliced open.

The pandan-flavoured cake is soaked in salted *gula melaka* to create a moist, sweet and delicate cake base which is then layered with coconut buttercream frosting, a glaze of liquid palm sugar and a thin pandan coconut jelly for added texture.

It also comes in a fancier and fun version — the two-tiered jade green Onde-Onde Mini Cake which is topped with dots of the rich coconut buttercream frosting and garnished with shredded coconut. A highlight is the tiny squeeze tube on top that contains even more liquid palm sugar ready to be injected into the cake.

The Onde-Onde Cake and Mini Cake are subject to availability. Check Daun KL's social media page before you go. ●

Daun KL
KL branch —
Block B Level 2, MAHSA Avenue,
Jalan Ilmu off Jalan Universiti, 59100, Kuala Lumpur.
Saujana Putra branch —
MAHSA University, Jalan SP 2/7, Bandar Saujana
Putra, 42610, Jenjarom, Selangor
T: +6012 505 9147 / +6016 406 5218
FB/IG: @daun.kl



PHOTO: DAUN KL

As fresh as it gets



The culture surrounding what we eat is evolving. Environmental awareness and the overdue wariness of processed foods have seen the farm-to-table movement gaining pace in our restaurant industry, with an increasing number of eateries leaning towards sourcing their produce from natural or organic local suppliers. Here, we present a selection of eateries which champion the use of fresh or organic locally sourced products without sacrificing taste at the altar of wholesome eating.

Text **Vanessa Surian**

A stampede of sustainable flavours

THE CEILING SOARS high above, the seating appears to ensconce you in a birdcage-like cocoon with feathered accents and the city skyline is framed by glass panes that shield one indoors — this is Flock. Upon being ushered to your table, a glance around will reveal the open-kitchen layout where you can watch skilled chefs take ingredients — that are all ethically and locally sourced straight from local farms and artisanal food makers — and turn them into colourful dishes with a quirky spin.

“We get our fresh, organically-grown produce from Weeds & More; artisanal cheese makers Milky Whey supplies our array of cheese; and our chocolates are by local chocolatier Chocolate Concierge. Even our honey is sourced locally: the tualang honey that we use is a Malaysian multi-floral jungle honey mainly from the north-western region of Peninsular Malaysia,” a Flock spokesperson says.

With over 30 years of culinary experience under his belt, Australian-born director of culinary, chef Richard Millar, who has lived in various countries around the world relishes the food he grew up with while cultivating an interest in the convergence of various cultures and how it plays out in food.

One local dish that gets taken up several notches in Flock style is the humble rojak. A banana leaf is laid on the table, then the chef plates with precision.

As one dines in proximity to the open kitchen, Millar is always happy to answer the questions that diners may have. It is impossible to pin down and associate the culinary offerings at Flock to any one specific cuisine as it offers a variety of local favourites and influences from around the world. One local dish that gets taken up several notches in Flock style is the humble rojak. A banana leaf is laid on the table, then the chef plates with precision, adding ingredients like guava panna cotta, dehydrated jicama, pickled papaya, peanut crumble and paste, pineapple cake, shaved mango ice and chilli coconut espuma.

Then there is the hot volcanic stone that allows you to cook your own food on a miniature black stone cooking pot. It's available with wagyu beef, lamb loin and white cod. Accompanying them are condiments such as wasabi mayonnaise, sesame sauce, spicy red miso dip, shichimi, teriyaki sauce and ponzu sauce.

PHOTOS: FLOCK AT W KUALA LUMPUR



A mouthwatering range of heirloom varieties of the fruit are featured in Flock's Heirloom Tomato Salad





Torched fish salad

Flock is W Kuala Lumpur's all-day dining venue, but they also hold buffet brunches and dinners at times.

Replete with bubbles, wine, scrumptious cocktails, and a live DJ set, on the first and third Sunday of every month is the Sunday RETOX Brunch. Expect mouth-watering starters such as smoked salmon eggs Benedict, foie gras chawan mushi and smoked duck confit. A lavish cold seafood spread awaits, featuring Alaskan king crab legs and freshly shucked oysters. Anticipate sumptuous indulgences like wagyu beef rendang, wok-fried chilli crab and barbecued slipper lobster. The sushi and sashimi station is also a hit with many. Savour locally-made artisanal cheese from Milky Whey such as the Goat Sarawak, Smoked Gouda, Amber Blue and Paprika Lavoush. Lastly, get your sugar fix with dainty delectables like Local Fig Caramel Cheesecake, Plum Frangipani Tarts and tiny little *har-gao* and *siew mai*-shaped dim sum

chocolates from local chocolatier Chocolate Concierge.

Every 2nd and 4th Friday, the RETOX at Dusk is held, a swanky star-studded semi-buffet dinner to kick start the weekend. The buffet spread features Alaskan king crab legs and scallops. Mains are prepared à la minute (when ordered) and encompass scrumptious offerings such as the Miso White Cod with Daikon Fondant and Edamame, the Sous Vide Lamb Rack, Potato Gratin, Garlic Fried Beans and Red Wine Sauce, and the Char-grilled Wagyu Tri-Tip Steak with Foie Gras, Fig Jam, Sea Urchin Butter and Confit Tomato. ●

Flock, W Kuala Lumpur
121, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur,
50450 Kuala Lumpur
T: +60 12-347 9088
www.marriott.com

Rustic simplicity meets elegant fine-dining

“LISA AND I HAVE worked in cities all our adult lives and I guess it was just time to do something different,” muses Pete Teo, who co-owns and runs a little farm on the hill with wife Lisa.

Just a 45-minute drive from Kuala Lumpur, the farm-to-table restaurant and certified organic farm is located in the forested hills of Janda Baik, Pahang. They also conduct yoga, cheese-making, gardening and other artisanal classes as well as supply fresh vegetable produce to fine-dining restaurants in KL.

“Creating an organic farm and farm-to-table restaurant was an opportunity for us to learn new skills as well as make a modest contribution to the community and environment. To be able to feel challenged, make new friends and create a special place at this stage of our lives have been a pleasure and privilege really. We are extremely lucky,” says Pete.

Pete considers the staff of eight who live onsite, including housekeepers, supervisors and farmhands, as family.

“We are in our early 50’s — an age when most people are winding down a career built over decades. So to be able to still find fresh challenges by creating something new and special is a wonderful thing,” he adds.

“a little farm on the hill is an opportunity to make a modest contribution to the community and the environment,” says Pete



Lisa was an architect for over twenty years, while Pete was, and still is, a filmmaker and musician.

“She takes care of the culinary side of the operation and I manage the farming side. Neither of us had any prior experience in horticulture before we started this five years ago. We received a lot of help from farmer friends and then learned on the job. It’s been fun,” he enthuses.

Their food is an eclectic fusion of influences from around the world — Middle Eastern, European and Malaysian — with a unifying guiding principle that paramount importance is placed upon the quality and freshness of the ingredients.

“It is not uncommon for us to serve greens that were in the soil merely hours ago. This allows us to create food that is light and honest yet simultaneously complex and layered.”

Situated 600m above sea level and literally encased by jungle, the place is agreeably cool, and the surroundings are home to a huge assortment of wildlife such as monkeys, boars, eagles and hornbills.

“Great food is only one part of the experience we offer. The other is the simple beauty of our farm. It’s pretty and idyllic here — perfect for escaping from the furore of the city,” Pete points out.

Notes

1. a little farm on the hill only provides service by pre-booking at least one week in advance and doesn’t do walk-ins. Those who attempt to visit without reservations or appointment will be turned away by the security guard at the estate gate.
2. It is open for lunch bookings every Wednesday through to Sunday, and do not do dinners.
3. A minimum spend of RM2,200 is required for private bookings. Depending on the menu chosen, this equates to a minimum of seven to eight people. For smaller groups, they recommend their public events, where no minimum spend applies.
4. A list of public events and communal lunches are published on their website alittlefarmonthehill.com, where guests may directly book seats online. Private bookings are conducted via email correspondence.





PHOTOS: A LITTLE FARM ON THE HILL



Situated 600 metres above sea level, a little farm on the hill is literally encased by jungle

“It is not uncommon for us to serve greens that were in the soil merely hours ago. This allows us to create food that is light and honest yet simultaneously complex and layered.”



The farm buildings sit on a hill with willowy trees and ponds interwoven by terraces of vegetable beds and flowers.

Visitors to this haven can enjoy the popular signature 12-Leaf Salad, which consists of at least 12 different types of greens, freshly harvested or foraged from the grounds. Paired with a light, subtle dressing, the complexity of the mixed greens shine through with notes of citrus, and the flavours are earthy, tart, sweet and spicy.

“Another favourite is our smoked beef. Top quality short ribs are dry-rubbed with a simple salt and pepper marinade, then smoked in our brick smoker for six to seven hours at 135° Celsius,” says Pete.

The dish is served hot, with homemade pickles and spicy tomato salsa, and the result is pretty unforgettable — juicy, deep, savoury yet clean and satisfying.

Pete describes a little farm on the hill as a cross between great country cooking and exclusive fine-dining.

“With an average spend of around RM300 per person, we are not cheap — but guests do get their money’s worth. We are particularly popular with people celebrating special occasions like birthdays, small weddings, family gatherings and corporate off-sites.

“Folks who appreciate fine cuisine served in an idyllic country ambience and agrarian hospitality would like what we do.” ●

a little farm on the hill
 Lot 161, Tanarimba, Janda Baik,
 Persiaran Enderong, Bukit Tinggi,
 28750, Bentong, Pahang, Malaysia
 T: +609 233 0194 | E: info@alittlefarmonthehill.com
 alittlefarmonthehill.com

Avant-garde nose-to-tail eating

ENTIER MEANS “WHOLE” or “entire” in French, describing the nose-to-tail and sustainable eating concept of Entier French Dining. This casual dining place draws upon the finesse of fine-dining but serves up approachable, communal dishes for sharing. The avant-garde ambience is designed to encourage a relaxed atmosphere, and is far removed from the typical stiffly starched white table linens.

Executive Chef Masashi Horiuchi, who honed his chops in Europe, is behind the French cuisine served here with its immaculate balance of flavours and exceptional plating. “Coming from over two decades of fine-dining background, I wish to extend the experience and culinary finesse which I have gathered from my training... to an even greater crowd with a more approachable style of French cuisine, and in fact, my personal style of it,” he says.



Produce is sourced locally or from surrounding regions to reduce carbon footprint

Nose-to-tail dining ensures that there is no waste in the ingredients, in contrast to the typical approach of only serving a limited selection of cuts that are perceived as the best. Entier also sources their produce from Malaysia, or from the surrounding regions to reduce its carbon footprint.

“I really like the produce that’s available in this country; for me as a chef, the ability to access quality produce (whether in small batches or not), is really interesting and important, and I try to create my plates with my own style using the excellent produce that I come across through my farm visits or interactions with suppliers.

“I think by doing this, I’m directly contributing to the maturing and evolving dining culture of this city, and debunking the misconception that imported ingredients are always luxurious

and better. I hope at the end, I can in some way encourage chefs and fellow restauranters in this city to be more adventurous and daring in going beyond the boundaries, and for diners to also look beyond the dishes and find meaning in what they consume,” Horiuchi explains.

One of Entier’s signatures is the Whole Chicken, using a whole locally-bred Anxin chicken. The breast is roasted with black truffle within a salt crust dough while the legs of the chicken are done confit-style — ensuring that all parts of the bird are served at their optimum tenderness. These are served with chicken fat mashed potatoes, gravy, mushroom sauce and herb salad. The Anxin chicken is respectfully cultivated in a stress-free and natural environment under natural light, without antibiotics and growth promoters. Horiuchi likens the Anxin chicken to its French counterpart in taste, texture and aroma.

Another highlight is the cold mud crab appetiser, marinated with curry mayonnaise and dark crab meat, crunchy tobiko, chives and Tonburi “mountain caviar”. Traditionally enjoyed in France with fresh mayonnaise or aioli, Entier elevates this dish by marrying the sweetness of the Indonesian mud crab’s silky flesh with a contrasting crunchy texture of the tobiko and Tonburi “mountain caviar”. The amalgamation of flavours from the sea and mountain makes this dish an excellent way to start your meal.

The Crab, Caviar & Waffle served in a caviar metal tin features sweet and decadent Indonesian mud crab meat which is hand-pulled and seasoned, layered with lobster jelly, and topped with a generous layer of caviar. This is enjoyed together with fresh waffle and pepper sour cream.

If you’ve ever wondered if there are local options for caviar, then try the Tropical Caviar from Tanjung Malim — harvested fresh from locally-bred sturgeons. Unlike imported counterparts, locally produced caviar enables one to consume it fresh, unpasteurised and preservative-free, allowing all the original flavours and textures of the luxurious fish roe to come to the fore.

Indulge in the French Waffle made fresh in-house with every order. France and Belgium are the only countries in the world that use yeast in its making, which makes the French waffle extra crisp on the outside, and fluffy on the inside. This versatile pastry is served with both savoury and sweet dishes. ●

Entier French Dining
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No. 58, Jalan Ang Seng,
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T: +603 2268 3819
E: bonjour@entierfrenchdining.com
entierfrenchdining.com

“I try to create my plates with my own style using the excellent produce that I come across through my farm visits or interactions with suppliers.”



PHOTOS: ENTIER

Cultivating the roots of good living

A HYBRID DINING concept — a farm-to-table restaurant, a lounge, a private event venue and an urban farming laboratory — The Farm Foodcraft is all about getting back to the roots of good living, which stems from good food, good values and good people.

Siew Ching, the owner and operator speaks passionately about what she does, “The farm-to-table concept isn’t some new-age, hipster idea; it’s what our parents and their parents before them did before everything became centred on convenience and speed.

“What we want to be able to show people is that if you can, for instance, get tomatoes fresh off the vine, or herbs harvested directly from a living plant, why would you want to have something that’s bottled and refrigerated? It’s not

just about taste; eating right and eating fresh just do wonders for your well-being.

“The goal is to return to how our parents and grandparents were connected to the food they obtained and nourished themselves with, as a form of self-care.

“We want people to be conscious about where their food comes from, and to see the value of using ingredients nurtured and grown locally.

“It’s about rebuilding our connection with food, with nature and with the world around us, so that we can gain a deeper appreciation of how important it is to care for our surroundings — and by extension, ourselves.”

At The Farm Foodcraft, fresh flavours are served up with local flair. Ingredients and produce, some of which are cultivated in and harvested directly from their

urban farming lab, are brought straight to your table. Every recipe is crafted with local flair and a fresh twist, and is therefore familiar, yet unexpected. Classic international recipes are brought to life, and enriched with local ingredients, tastes and textures.

“At first glance, our Crab Risotto looks like the classic Italian dish,” says Siew Ching.

The creamy risotto is sauteed with mushrooms and capsicum, then crowned with a crunchy, deep-fried soft shell crab. “It’s when you dig into the generous dollops of house-made XO sauce that your tastebuds are ignited and delighted; it adds a deep Asian texture that both complements and enhances the rich flavours.”

Their Happy Harvest is simple, but is one of their signature dishes for a good reason; all the fresh seasonal greens used



Their signature Happy Harvest features fresh seasonal greens from the urban farming lab, which is tossed with ice plants, mixed berries and home-made honey passion fruit dressing

PHOTOS: THE FARM FOOD CRAFT

The Farm Foodcraft's beef burger, where a classic international recipe is brought to life, and enriched with local ingredients, tastes and textures



in it are harvested from their urban farming lab, then tossed with ice plants, mixed berries and homemade honey passion fruit dressing.

Meanwhile, Lala Land is a local take on the classic spaghetti vongole, using local *lala* clams and spicy, aromatic Bentong ginger to create a concoction that's part Italian, part Chinese, and all delicious.

"In many ways, the way we think of and consume our food has gone awry, and the farm-to-table movement is a course-correction for the better, a return to a simpler, better time.

"The Farm Foodcraft isn't just a restaurant, but a responsible member of the community. We want to play a part in bringing a better quality of nutrition to the people around the area, while also raising awareness on the importance of eating fresher and eating better, of becoming food secure, of reducing wastage, and generally of consuming responsibly.

"We want to demonstrate that eating well translates to living well, and that a better understanding and appreciation for food can lead to a fundamental shift in how we see ourselves, our society and our environment." ●

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A celebration of herbs

IN THE BEACH TOWN of Port Dickson in Negeri Sembilan, and within the Port Dickson Ostrich Farm, lies Herbal Oasis Farm.

Set up in 2015, the small herb and vegetable farm of only half an acre has garnered considerable interest in the coastal town, particularly from those looking to savour its healthy yet flavourful herbal cuisine made from the herbs and vegetables grown on the farm, complemented by fresh sea fish from the local market.

The place is founded by herbalist Stella Kiang, who grew up in a family of Chinese traditional chiropractic treatment practitioners in Port Dickson. As a result, she is now a keen student of herbal medicine.

"There are many native herbs in Malaysia that have great medicinal value, with some that are yet to be discovered. Instead of consuming western supplements, we could actually enhance our health using these natural herbs," says Kiang, who has a bachelor's degree in Science, majoring in Biology and Chemistry.

Continues next page →



Ulam fish with Herbal Oasis Farm's signature herbal sauce

PHOTOS: HERBAL OASIS



PHOTOS: HERBAL OASIS

Left: The appetising flower fruit salad

Below: Herbal Oasis Farm, located within the Port Dickson Ostrich Farm, also offers cooking classes

← From previous page

The initial idea of Herbal Oasis Farm was to introduce the health benefits of local herbs to both Malaysians and tourists visiting Port Dickson by promoting the use of such herbs in food and drinks.

A visit to the herbal farm may take at least two hours as Kiang herself walks visitors through the farm and explains about the health benefits of the herbs planted there. Over 60 types of herbs and vegetables are currently grown at the farm.

“The concept of farm-to-table came about following rising requests from visitors who were famished when the tour ended around noon. Some would ask whether we could prepare some food just so they could chill and enjoy a meal at the farm before they were to leave,” she adds.

And since the concept was in tune with her objective of promoting herbal dining, she worked out the menu pretty quickly based on what’s available from her farm.

“I use the herbs to make dipping sauce or dressing for the salads. However, there’s a limited supply [of vegetables] in my farm, hence, I have to source from other local farms or the morning wet market,” she explains.

Meals are only served during weekends with reservations to be made one week earlier but requests are increasing and at one time, she hosted up to 80 guests who came in two coaches.

Lunch at Herbal Oasis Farm costs RM48 per adult, RM38 per child aged 8 to 12 and RM20 for each child under the age of seven.

Diners can enjoy a three-course meal of a colourful starter salad of edible flowers and fruit with a homemade herb sauce, a main course of fish or vegetarian choices and finish off with a sweet soup as dessert, all washed down with a herbal drink.

Kiang also offers ala-carte snacks, homemade cakes and coconut-based rejuvenating soups by special request, subject to reservations of at least one week in advance.

“All the dishes are cooked on the day itself, hence early reservations are needed to ensure we have time to prepare the fresh ingredients,” she explains.

Currently, the farm-to-table lunch is available at its flagship show garden in Port Dickson as well as at Morus Berries Valley Farm in Bukit Tinggi, Pahang — a joint-venture between Herbal Oasis Farm and a local farm owner. Kiang has also recently set-up a showroom in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur called Herbeco where lunch could also be prepared with prior booking.

“Our objective is to get people to use herbs in their daily life and encourage them to eat real food. We hope every visitor would enjoy healthy meals with their family without hurting their wallet,” says Kiang. — *Tan Ai Leng* ●

Herbal Oasis Farm
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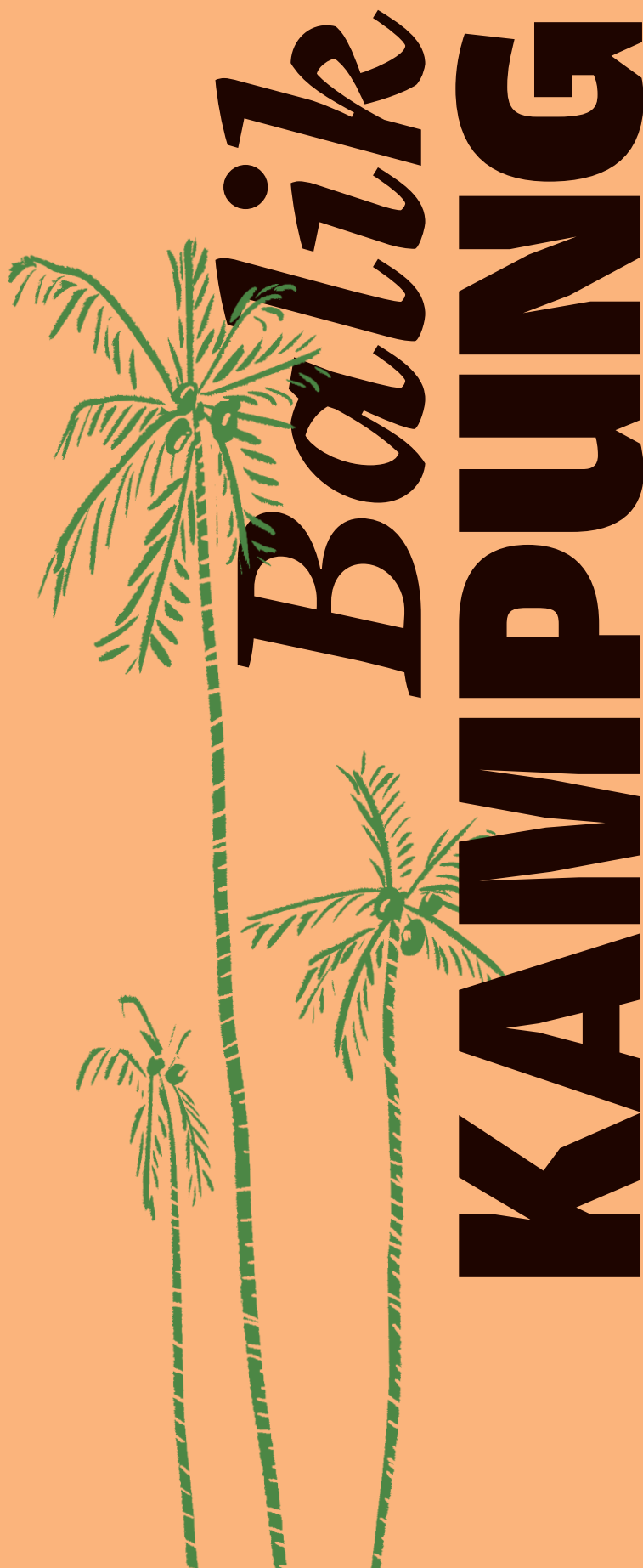
The humble kampung house has long been a symbol of vernacular architecture and cultural identity in Malaysia, though its numbers are fast dwindling.

Just the phrase *Balik Kampung* evokes nostalgic memories of times coloured by the warmth of family and friends in the safety of a relaxed environment where everyone knew and looked out for each other.

Fortunately, there are retreats which continue to celebrate the essence of the quintessential kampung house without sacrificing the trappings of modernity, providing guests with the best of both worlds.

Join us on a sojourn that pays homage to vernacular architecture in settings that soothe the soul and calm the mind.

Text **Chuah Bee Kim**



The warmth of traditional hospitality

“IT IS LIKE BEING invited to a friend’s place”, “the food is delicious”, “the wine cellar is impressive” are just some of the comments from guests who have visited Bon Ton Resort Langkawi on the island of Langkawi, Kedah.

Located off the beaten track with a view of wetlands and paddy fields, the main building houses Nam Restaurant and a shop gallery filled with an eclectic range of Malaysian textiles, accessories, homeware, art and sculpture.

The restaurant, well known for its authentic local Malay cuisine, can seat up to 100 people, and when there are more guests, tables can be set up in the garden by the pool.

Adjacent to the shop gallery is the walk-in wine room, where guests can pick and choose a good bottle or two for dinner.

On the grounds, just steps away from the main

building, are eight fully refurbished antique Malay kampung houses — rustic yet elegant in their simplicity, all offering a unique and comfortable stay.

The lush gardens, the surrounding wetlands and a bordering inlet filled with lotus flowers provides a tranquil backdrop to the resort.

Guests can relax by the pool or Jacuzzi, watch the sunset descend into the horizon in the evenings with one of Bon Ton’s famous daiquiris or margaritas in hand, and be woken up every morning by the melodious chirping of birds.

Bon Ton Restaurant Kuala Lumpur opened in an old colonial bungalow in the city in 1987, complete with an antiques gallery and wine room.

The decision to expand to Langkawi was made in 1992 and Bon Ton Langkawi opened as a sister restaurant and gallery shop in February 1994.



PHOTOS: BON TON

Nam Restaurant serves Malay cuisine and can seat up to 100 people



At that time, the site was a coconut plantation. In contrast to the city restaurant, Bon Ton Langkawi was set up as a restaurant cum shop gallery with a casual and relaxed open-air feel. The KL business was sold off in 1999.

The Langkawi restaurant serves both western and local specialties of Nyonya and Malay cuisine, and of course seafood courtesy of its location.

Given its stunning setting, Bon Ton soon evolved into a boutique resort.

Between 1995 and 2004, eight antique Malay kampong wooden houses and a Chinese provision shop were identified, dismantled and relocated to the site from different locations around the island and from the mainland.

They ranged in age from 90 to 120 years old. It took approximately two weeks to pull down the houses and up to three months to reassemble them. Restoration works required patience and attention to detail and were completed by local carpenters skilled in the old tradition of vernacular house construction.

Once the work was completed, modern amenities were installed, and each house was decorated in a unique Aseana style.

All houses are totally different in layout and decor. The furniture used are antiques and the fabric was sourced from around the region especially Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Each villa is equipped with all the comforts of a luxury hotel from air-conditioning to bathtubs and shower facilities, ceiling fans, TV, DVD/CD players, tea/coffee making facilities, toaster and a fridge.

Five of the houses have outdoor private sundecks with freestanding wooden bathtubs and sun loungers so guests can enjoy the sun by day and the stars at night.

The other three have wooden bathtubs as well, but installed within the main house itself.

Guests are often wowed by their stay made all the more special by the warm hospitality of the Bon Ton staff.

This is certainly a treat for those looking for a boutique resort with a difference. ●

Guests can revel in residing in an authentic kampong chalet

Bon Ton Restaurant & Resort
Pantai Cenang, 07000 Langkawi
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The Simple Life at Spyder Hill

Spyder Hill in Negeri Sembilan features a touch of Minangkabau architecture and plenty of attitude

WHEN GIRLS HER AGE were playing with dolls, Suze Q, as she is affectionately known, was collecting bugs. The 36-year-old Kuala Lumpur-born Suze had two tarantulas, but she eventually saw the downside of keeping spiders in captivity.

Her husband, Penang-born Nikt Wong, 48, lived in KL for 16 years before deciding to make the move to Negeri Sembilan where the couple now resides in a house that sits on a little outcrop of its own.

Called Spyder Hill, the couple offers a homestay concept, where Wong and Suze will “as much or as little as you like, get involved in your stay here”.

“This approach works well with tourists especially foreigners staying for a short period of time. We engage in conversations and take them out to experience local food and interests, depending on the chemistry,” says Wong.

The house has two rooms for guests that can accommodate a total of seven to eight people.



PHOTOS: NIKT WONG & SUZE Q

“Guests get to use the spacious shared living room that has several unique corners to spend time in. We sell our rooms with a minimum of two nights’ stay for RM770,” Wong says.

“The main activity here is jungle trekking to a waterfall with natural swimming pools or just a picnic by the stream. Many people from the city find the air calming, and that simply unwinds them into lounging mode.

“We also offer traditional massage for men and women. For photography enthusiasts, I offer a customisable photography workshop. We also offer couples or single portrait taking which can be done with a jungle or rustic ambience,” he adds.

It all started in 2010 when an old friend suggested that the couple check out this piece of land situated next to the Berembun forest reserve in the district of Seremban.

When they eventually saw the hilly outcrop several months later, it was love at first sight. They imagined living in a house perched precariously on the outcrop, and that was how Spyder Hill came about.

The couple visited junk yards and began collecting some old doors and windows even before they knew where to use them.

“We bought old ‘discarded’ furniture and up-cycled them. Suze is very good at picking materials and colours and matching the items into the space while I drew the plans for the contractor,” explains Wong.

It took three years for Spyder Hill to be completed.

“We have a 200-metre driveway leading to the house and many trees have been left to grow around the house to isolate it from the neighbours.

“We spent a lot of time on the land measuring and figuring out how it would sit. It was rather challenging as it was a hill slope and we wanted to preserve the trees around it.”

Eventually, they decided on a kampung house design with a few Negeri Sembilan design features thrown in.

“Our roof has a slight curved design borrowed from the Minangkabau architectural elements. The rest of the house became “vernacular” due to the items of furniture we had collected such as the salvaged doors, windows, recycled beams



The great outdoors — no air-conditioner needed

and even carvings collected from torn down houses in Negeri Sembilan and other states like Perak and Melaka.

“Things just came together in a serendipitous way. I’ve always had a longing to live in a tree house or in a place surrounded by nature. The stress of living in KL helped in our decision to move,” Wong adds.

Suze studied advertising and has a natural flair for design and styling. The couple met when they were doing photo shoots together, sharing a love for rustic antiques and design styles from the 60s and 70s.

Wong, who studied economics, worked in the finance industry and was a tech entrepreneur before becoming a professional photographer in 2003.

The couple’s life, says Wong, is always aiming to migrate from the complex towards the simple, and putting down roots in a bucolic setting is a great start! ●

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The bedroom exudes rustic charm

STEPPING INTO the Terrapuri Heritage Village resort is like entering the realm of a mystical lost kingdom with its clusters of ancient dark wood Malay traditional timber houses and structures set against lush and serene surroundings. But these are no ordinary houses — these were once homes of aristocrats.

Being a descendant of 15th and 16th century Peranakan Chinese whose culture has intertwined with that of the local Malays, Alex Lee has developed a passion for collecting Malay heirlooms since he was a child.

Over the span of 30 years, Lee has amassed a collection of old Malay kampung houses ranging from 100 to 250 years old.

All 29 houses in the collection were previously owned by Malay noblemen in Terengganu. The houses were dismantled at their original sites in various parts of the state of Terengganu and relocated to

Terrapuri Heritage Village where they were restored and re-assembled.

Terrapuri, meaning Land of Palaces in Sanskrit — to reflect the houses' heritage — is located in Kampung Mangkok, Setiu, Terengganu.

Lee, 51, is determined to preserve the historical value of the Malay kampung house despite the fact that restoration works are costly and the returns are low.

For the self-made businessman, it was never about money. It was primarily about prioritising the preservation of historical and cultural assets, although he believes that conserving heritage buildings is like buying antiques, where their value will increase over time.

Terrapuri Heritage Village was developed to the tune of RM10 million and was declared open in 2011 with 22 villas and seven complexes serving as the reception, spa and meeting room, among others.

Terrapuri took shape when Lee stumbled upon a piece of land for sale in Kampung Mangkok in 2005. The sprawling, four-hectare plot of land runs parallel to the banks of Sungai Setiu fronting the South China Sea.

“It was the perfect spot to feature my jewels (the houses),” Lee says.

Due to the high cost of restoring the old houses, Lee had kept some of the dismantled pieces in Marang for 20 years before he came across the ideal home for them. Thus began the Terrapuri project.

Restoration work began in 2006. The houses, built using chengal wood, were devoid of nails but utilised the *pasak* and *tanggam*. The architecture of the buildings are similar to those in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia.

“I used singgora tiles for the roofs and constructed ponds around some of the houses to enhance the tranquillity and aesthetics,” he adds.

Land of Palaces



Above: Step back into the past

Left: Intricate wood carvings complement the natural backdrop

PHOTOS: TERRAPURI HERITAGE VILLAGE



Terrapuri features clusters of Malay kampung houses ranging from 100 to 250 years old

Prior to the Terrapuri project, Lee had in 1988, transformed two wooden shoplots in Marang (a fishing village in Terengganu and Lee's hometown) that were owned by his grandfather into a resthouse.

The resthouse became a popular stopover for tourists heading to Kuala Terengganu or Pulau Kapas. However, that came to an end when the then state government decided to revoke the shops' Temporary Occupation Licence titles and demolished the "old, ugly" wooden shops to make way for "nice, modern" concrete buildings.

"Tourism in Marang came to a halt when its heritage charm disappeared," he laments.

"Conservation can stand as an industry in its own right, like in Europe, for instance. It will give the tourism sector a competitive edge."

Lee says that it is vital for Terengganu — dubbed the cradle of Malay civilisation by historian Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard — to not lose its heritage as it is the pride of the state. ●

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Activities and nearby attractions

Guests at Terrapuri can take part in activities such as trekking, island hopping or just chill and have some laid-back fun with traditional games.

Nearby are beautiful beaches adorned with coconut groves and the Setiu wetlands. One can go on a river safari and enjoy the fireflies, or simply head out to the nearby fishing village.

There are day trips to Redang Island, Bidong Island and Lang Tengah Island. One can also take the Kenyir Lake cruise and enjoy the view of the waterfalls, the Kelah fish sanctuary and indulge in birding activities.

For art and culture

lovers, there is the floating art of Langkasuka heritage trail, fruit orchard (*dusun warisan*), cooking classes, *wayang kulit*, *mak yong* dance and gamelan performances.

Other things to see and do in the area include wood carving, wau making, pandanus weaving, boat building, the Kuala Terengganu city tour, the Lata Payung waterfall trekking and the East Coast Peranakan Trail.

A special promotion package can start from as low as RM429 per superior villa with breakfast for two, says Lee, who is also the deputy chairman of the Terengganu Tourism Association.

Finding peace in the forest

EVER WONDERED WHAT it would be like to have your own private resort? A stay at Aman Rimba will allow you to live out this dream. Throughout the duration of your stay here, no one else will be allowed to set foot on the premises apart from you and your invited guests.

Spread over three acres, the six well-appointed kampung-style villas can comfortably hold up to 35 persons.

The villas are not rented out individually, as rental arrangements cover all six villas and only one party can rent the entire estate at an average price starting from RM3,900++ per night.

Aman Rimba started out as a fruit orchard in 1997 but the owner enjoyed the peaceful surroundings so much that in 2004, he built the first villa there called Villa Sireh, just so that he could spend more time in this serene setting.

It wasn't until 2005 that he decided to build three more

Experience the simplicity of kampung life in Aman Rimba and unwind at the pool

villas — Villa Serai, Villa Kunyit and Villa Halia to accommodate family reunions and meetings with corporate clients. In the same year he added Villa Kanta 1 and 2 to cater to even larger groups of people.

The owner says the name Aman Rimba represents the pleasant feelings of relaxation that the place evokes. Surrounded by flora and fauna, away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, tired minds and souls are refreshed and rejuvenated.

The idea to rent out the private estate came about when Kampung Janda Baik, a small village in Bentong, Pahang, began to gain a reputation as an ideal place for nature retreats. Capitalising on this interest, the once private estate found its niche, catering to families and corporate clients.

The design of the property was inspired by the timeless craftsmanship of traditional Malay kampung houses using contemporary materials. The entire place represents a typical small Malay kampung back in the days when families and extended families lived together on a piece of land, albeit in different houses, owned by the patriarch or matriarch of the family.

The families however, shared the common facilities which is replicated at Aman Rimba such as the communal kitchen, eating pavilion, playground, a surau, showers and even toilets. Just outside Aman Rimba flows the tranquil Sungai Benus to tempt those who wish to take a refreshing dip.

Aman Rimba is owned by Serene Forest Sdn Bhd and is managed by KAS Aman Rimba Sdn Bhd. ●

Aman Rimba Private Estate
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PHOTOS: AMAN RIMBA



Surrender to the peaceful surroundings



Indoors and outdoors are equally charming



At home at Rumah Singgora

MOHAMAD SALLEH BOUGHT a total of 12 kampung houses located in the centre of town near Kota Bharu after the floods that hit Kelantan in 2014. The houses were more than a century old, worn by age and battered by the floods. They needed tender loving care and Mohamad decided that he should give them a new lease of life.

Having a love for nature, and being proud of his Malay heritage, the 43-year-old civil engineer believes that a kampung house is a treasure and a symbol of the nation's culture, history and identity.

In 2015, reconstruction of five of the kampung houses began and the project was fully completed in two years. They now make up Mohamad's home and homestay called Rumah Singgora, derived from a type of traditional roof tile made of clay, which is featured prominently on the houses.

"We tried to keep the original structure of the houses as much as we could," says Mohamad.

"Chengal wood from the houses that could no longer be salvaged were recycled as *tanggam* (wedge-shaped joint interlocking two pieces of wood)," he adds.

At the heart of these homes are the intricate wood carvings and motifs that beautifully illustrate the skill and artistic flair of their creators.



Left: The chalets retain much of the structures of the original kampung houses rescued from a flood near Kota Bharu

Right: The main steps leading into the kampung house carries a nostalgic quality



PHOTOS: RUMAH SINGGORA

Mohamad moved into two of the chalets after they were completed and in 2018 opened the three other chalets (Rumah Melor, Rumah Kemboja and Rumah Melati) as homestays or venues for photo shoots.

The rooms are quiet, clean and spacious. “Guests can enjoy the simplicity of life in a kampung house with no gadgets and modern technology. However, there are facilities to ensure that guests have a comfortable stay as there is a fan, bathroom and hot shower in each chalet.

“But guests also like to use the water from the well where they can draw up the water using a *timba* (bucket),” he says, adding that water from the well is usually colder and more refreshing. Alternatively, guests can opt for a *mandi bunga* (floral bath) using flowers and kaffir limes by the well.

Furthermore, there is a spot at the homestay where mineral water can be sourced from the ground.

For meals, guests will be served special Kelantanese fare such as *nasi berlauk* or *nasi kerabu*. A must-have here is the boiled bananas or *bodo* fried bananas.

Mohamad, who loves natural organic food, says the menu also includes *gulai siput sedut* (a shellfish

curry), *belut paprika* (an eel dish), *ikan pekasam* (fish), kampung chicken and *kerabu pucuk paku* (fern salad).

For outdoor recreation, there is a host of activities that no smart gadgets could replace such as river rafting, horse riding or just taking a dip in the nearby river. Guests can try their hands at rubber tapping as well.

And for the introverts who prefer the indoors, there is batik painting and wau doodling, among other activities. ●

Rumah Singgora
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Kelantan
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IF YOU SHARE Tan Yong Yeow's love for the environment and do not mind getting some dirt on you, then you would probably appreciate a stay at his Rainforest Tree House in Kulai, Johor.

Inspired by the experience he gained while working at an organic eco farm in Kahang, in Johor's Kluang district, the 37-year-old from Muar decided to create a sanctuary of treehouses where he could spread his message of love for Mother Nature.

Tan, who likes to be called Ah Yao, considers himself an environmentalist and wants people, especially the younger generation, to experience the joy of going back to basics.

"I find great inner peace whenever I am with nature. A tree house brings out our inner child. I feel that everyone should experience life in the jungle," says Ah Yao.

"By creating and spreading environmental awareness, I hope we can stop or deter illegal logging activities. I believe the world has enough resources to provide what humans need, but simply not enough for human greed," he adds.

Rainforest Tree House was set up in 2014. Spread over 1.2ha and situated at Jalan Air Terjun in Kampung Sri Gunung Pulai, Ah Yao hired a team of builders who used hammers, nails, saws and knives to construct 14 treehouses.

"About five to 10 carpenters would work on the project at any one time. It was hard work but fun as we felt we were doing something meaningful," he says.

Ah Yao also enjoys sharing vegetable and fruit growing tips with guests, as he is a strong advocate for eating fresh organic produce.

"Our guests comprise of locals as well as visitors from across the Causeway. Guests can cook their meals over an open fire. The food really tastes different when it is cooked this way.

"They can read a book, meditate, go jungle-trekking — the Rainforest is where you come to rejuvenate the weary soul. Simplicity brings clarity of thought," offers Ah Yao.

The interiors of each treehouse have only the bare minimum such as mattresses, mosquito nets and electricity sockets.

The rainforest retreat offers city dwellers a chance to get away from the noise and pollution, hustle and bustle of urban life. It is ideal for those craving a sojourn that is unapologetically basic and has activities that can be enjoyed by both the young and the old. ●

Rainforest Tree House
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Living it up with nature

PHOTO: RAINFOREST TREE HOUSE

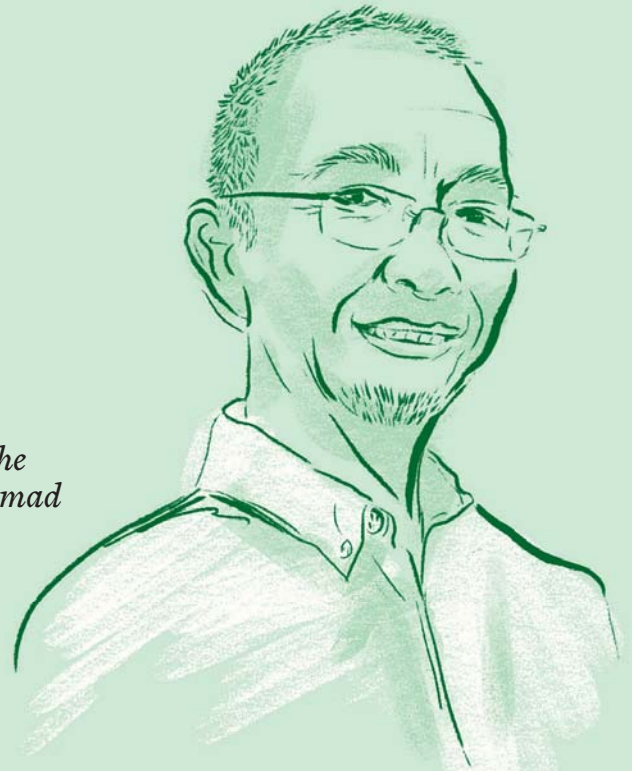


The treehouse is in perfect harmony with the surrounding greenery

Protecting our cultural identity

Malaysia's vernacular architecture is part of the nation's cultural identity and Prof Dr Muhammad Pauzi Abdul Latif is hoping more can be done to help the younger generation appreciate and preserve the homes built by our forefathers.

Text **Chuah Bee Kim**



PROF DR MUHAMMAD PAUZI ABDUL LATIF'S grandfather, a boat maker, was also skilled in restoring kampung houses, a skill passed down through generations.

Muhammad Pauzi wants to keep his grandfather's legacy alive. To him, the kampung house is a national treasure and his mission is to save these traditional homes in Malaysia from disappearing over time.

But it is an uphill task as the younger generation is not interested, and neither are the relevant authorities whom Muhammad Pauzi feels should be doing more to preserve the national identity.

"In the old days, steel nails were not used as they have a tendency to rust over time. Instead the builders will use *pasak* (wooden pegs) and *tanggam* (wedge-shaped joints interlocking two pieces of wood together).

"Termites were not feared, as the wood used were Chengal and Balau, which are very hardy," he says.

The 54-year-old associate professor and museum director at International Institute of Islamic Civilisation and Malay World is a registered conservator with the National Heritage Department specialising in Malay traditional houses.

A former director of Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Malay Heritage Museum and lecturer in Communications before he retired, Muhammad Pauzi cites

the Pahang House as a success story in conservation. The house was dismantled onsite in a village in Jerantut, Pahang, and re-assembled at the Malay Heritage Centre on UPM's grounds in 2015. The house was donated by Datuk Ahmad Nazlan Idris, the Member of Parliament for Jerantut.

The Pahang House once belonged to a village chief named Penghulu Ismail Khatib Bakar. It had survived three flash floods (in 1926, 1972 and 2014) while some of the surrounding houses were swept away.

"High maintenance cost, lack of expertise and declining interest are among the factors why we see the disappearance of Malay traditional houses in Malaysia," says Muhammad Pauzi.

"It is very costly to restore an old kampung house. Chengal wood costs between RM60,000 and RM70,000 a tonne.

"To restore a house, we may need up to 10 to 15 tonnes, sometimes more. So, it is very expensive if we want to use the same type of wood," he adds.

Muhammad Pauzi wishes for more people and the government to be passionate about promoting the nation's cultural heritage.

He believes kampung houses are the best examples of traditional architecture as they are intertwined with ancient values that embrace the harmony of architecture, people and the environment.

"To me, vernacular houses or traditional houses represent the wisdom of traditional architecture and of living in harmony with nature. Traditional Malay designs have been known to have aesthetic elements or ornamentation that carry deep philosophical and even sacred meanings.

"The Malay kampung house is a model of a building that is environmentally sustainable. Traditional Malay architecture subsists in the hot and humid tropical climates and this essential fact governs the shapes, designs, and ornamentation used in the houses. Open spaces, high ceilings or roofs are needed to provide good ventilation," he says.

Hence, large windows are incorporated into the kampung house to allow for good air flow and natural light, saving on electricity while promoting good ventilation.

"These are among the sustainable elements of the kampung house design that can be adapted to contemporary architecture and are still relevant today," he adds. ●

Prof Dr Muhammad Pauzi is from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM), International Islamic University Malaysia, where he is an associate professor and the museum director.



WEEKEND

Research has shown that detaching oneself occasionally from the daily grind contributes to a healthy mind and lifestyle. However, it's not necessary to carve out swathes of time from your hectic schedule to secure a proper break.



Escapades

Instead, why not opt for a weekend getaway? Be it just for the day or overnight, a quick break offers a welcome dose of rest, relaxation and self-restoration.

To inspire you to embark upon your own weekend adventures, we shine a spotlight on some alternative options that we have explored.

Looking
for outdoor
adventures?
Try the small
town of Gopeng
in Perak.

Text and photos **Tim Teoh**

NESTLED BETWEEN the town of Kampar and Simpang Pulai, Gopeng is a former tin-mining town in Perak which has become popular among outdoor adventure-seekers especially those who enjoy caves, jungle treks and white-water rafting.

Known as a Black Area during the Communist Insurgency, the many limestone caves were used as hideouts by the insurgents, but today these caves attract avid cavers and nature lovers.

Gopeng is easily accessible from Kuala Lumpur and a comfortable drive will take about two hours via the North-South Highway.

The town offers lots of things to do for the active visitor, so to pack everything in 36 hours would be impossible, but we certainly tried to cover as much ground as we could within that time frame on a weekend outing there from KL.

Where Mother Nature reigns



7:00am: We started our journey from KL on a warm and hazy morning. It was an easy drive on the North-South Highway. The scenery became greener the further north we went and we knew Gopeng was near when we spotted limestone hills ahead. We exited the highway to Gopeng close to 9am, paying a toll of RM23.30.

9:00am: When we arrived in Gopeng town, it was like stepping back in time. Its old pre-war shophouses are still being used and lived in, although a few have been left dilapidated.

But first, we must eat. We went looking for breakfast at the Medan Gopeng food court located next to Pasar Gopeng. There were abundant halal and non-halal choices. We were told to try the steamed *paus* with a variety of filling including *char siew* and red bean paste. They have frozen ones as well which you could bring home.

We also tried the *lai fun* (rice noodle in clear broth) and *nasi lemak*. All were yummy and went down quickly accompanied by *leng mong ping* (iced lemonade using lemons and not limes) which we agreed was one of the most refreshing drinks we had ever tasted.



Home-cooked Gopeng Hill Asam Laksa

9:45am: After our hearty breakfast, we took a 30-minute drive to Kampung Ulu Geruntum, nestled within a thick forest where some resorts are located along the Kampar River, to start our first activity which is the Rafflesia Trek, to spot one of the largest flowers in the world. There must be a guide, usually a local *orang asli*, for most of the adventure activities in Gopeng's great outdoors. All activities can be arranged through the resort where you have chosen to stay in or through RiverBug Asia.

We met our guide at the resort and headed to the Semai orang asli village called Kampung Ulu Geruh to start our trek. The trek was an easy walk initially until we reached the foot of a hill. The uphill climb was quite challenging and we had to use ropes to ascend the hill to reach the Rafflesia site.

It took us almost an hour to get to the site but we were rewarded with the sight of the flower in various stages of bloom from "*ping pong*" to "*takraw*" to "*kobis*" and to full bloom. All weariness disappeared and we even forgot about the countless leeches that were feasting on us — we will not forget to don leech socks next time.

The species here is called *Rafflesia Cantleyi*. Contrary to what people say, the flower does not stink. It only stinks when it is rotting and will stay in full bloom for four to seven days.

On the way back we managed to find time to take a refreshing dip in the Kampar River before heading for lunch.

Below: A full bloom *Rafflesia Cantleyi* is a sight to behold

Facing page: Scenic views on the way to Kampung Ulu Geruh Orang Asli Village



“We were given a short safety briefing on how to paddle, what to do in case of emergency and were introduced to some rather interesting commands like ‘boom boom’, ‘on the job’, ‘paddle hard’ and so forth...”

1:00pm: For lunch, we decided to visit a quaint little stall nestled in the middle of a durian orchard called Gopeng Hill Asam Laksa. The place is run by three generations of a family — the grandmother is the cook, the mother is the assistant and the children are the waiters. The three-year-old stall usually sells out by 1pm, so we were lucky that day.

The taste was authentic and the broth was aromatic and flavourful. It certainly tasted better than it looked and we finished every morsel and drop of the broth. After a short break, we headed to our second activity — white-water rafting on the Kampar River.

2:30pm: We were given a short safety briefing on how to paddle, what to do in case of emergency and were introduced to some rather interesting commands like “boom boom”, “on the job”, “paddle hard” and so forth, which are employed to navigate the waters.



The handsome Rajah Brooke butterflies can be found along the banks of the Kampar River

After some simple water-confidence activities, our raft — filled with six people including the guide — began our journey down Kampar River. The initial part of the ride was rather relaxing as we enjoyed the greenery and unique plants along the river. But soon we arrived at our first rapid. “Paddle hard” was the order as we went over the so-called “easy drop” which pumped us up, readying us to take on the tougher rapids that came after that, in particular the “broken dam rapid” which was where “boom boom” came into play.

After that exhilarating stretch, we stopped at a small sandbank for a well-deserved break. Along the banks were some Rajah Brooke butterflies which mesmerised us with their jewel green and stark black wings. It was a leisurely ride down the river thereafter.

At the end of the journey, we were herded onto lorries, yes lorries, for our transfer out of the jungle back to the base.

4:30pm: Many of us were hungry after the exhilarating rafting and decided to make a stop at Mee Kari Ami. The noodle drenched in thick curry broth comes with some chili paste or sambal on the side. Add it into the fiery broth for more zing and pair the dish with *teh o ais limau* for a satisfying meal.



Mee Kari Ami with thick aromatic broth and fried tofu skin





Manoeuvring through the rapids of the Kampar River

6:00pm: We decided to have an early dinner as we had to get ready for some night activities. We went to Gopeng town to check out our options and soon realised that it might have been better to have had dinner at the resorts as most of the shops were closed, except for a handful of kopitiam. We decided to stop by Hong Jia Chinese Restaurant where the price of each dish was no more than RM5 per serving. One can either order individually or order a repertoire of dishes to share.

A local we met told us that we should have gone to Gaharu Tea Valley as it serves an interesting variety of dishes. However, it closes at 6pm. Maybe on our next visit.

7:00pm: We headed back to our resort to chill before our night jungle walk.

8:30pm: Although we had torchlights, the walk was done in complete darkness. After getting the hang of walking without lights, the jungle opened our eyes to its wonders as we saw glowing mushrooms and worms, fireflies and other remarkable living things that would not have been visible under artificial light.

9:45pm: Back at our resort, we were ready to crash for the night. It was an exhausting but enjoyable day. We did not need any air-conditioning in our rooms as the temperature goes down as the night progresses.

Handcrafted mouldings on one of the shophouses in Gopeng town



Above: Traditional tools of the mining trade in the past

Left: Inside Hup Teck soy sauce shop

9:00am: After breakfast at the resort, we checked out and decided to explore Gopeng town before leaving.

9:30am: Our first stop was at the Gaharu Valley where we got to see and learn about the Gaharu or agarwood and its many benefits and uses. There was a tour of the plantation available as well but we opted not to take it.

10:00am: We visited the Gopeng Museum next. It is only open on Saturdays and Sundays. Entrance is free and the place is maintained by donations and run by volunteers.

We spoke to the volunteer on duty that day and learnt that the premises once belonged to Eu Kong Pui (1853–1892), founder of “Eu Yan Sang”, the name behind the famous wellness brand of traditional Chinese herbs and medicine.

The museum is a must for museum buffs as it provides information on Gopeng’s history and exhibits relics from the past including tin-mining tools.

10:30am: Inspired by the stories we learnt from the Gopeng Museum, we took a drive around town and looked at its buildings with new eyes. We noticed some very intricate, colourful and interesting mouldings and frescoes on the facade of a few old shophouses, some of which have been left to decay.

According to locals, the mouldings were handcrafted and painted. Some featured birds like the phoenix, roses and even fish. When asked about their significance, we were told that it was just how people at the time appreciated art.

11:00am: We then visited the Heritage House which requires an entrance fee of RM5 for adults and RM3 for kids. Very similar to the Gopeng Museum but with more items from the past on show.

Medan Gopeng foodcourt
Jalan Pasar,
Pekan Gopeng

Gopeng Hill Asam Laksa
Jalan Kampung Pintu
Padang (151.04 km)
31600 Gopeng
T: +6016 668 9839

Restoran Hong Jai
116, Jalan Tasik,
Pekan Gopeng

HOGA, Gaharu Tea Valley Gopeng
Lot 9840, Mukim Teja,
Gopeng
T: +605 3511 999 /
+605 3575 888
www.hoga.my

RiverBug Asia
Branch Office: 19-C,
1st floor, Jln Kampung
Rawa, Gopeng
T: +6012 313 1006
www.riverbug.asia

Gopeng Museum
47-49 Jln Eu Kong,
Pekan Gopeng

Gopeng Heritage House
6, Jln Sungai Itik,
Pekan Gopeng
T: +605 359 7828/
+6017 578 5185

Hup Teck Soy Sauce
6, Jalan Kampung Rawa,
Pekan Gopeng



Soy sauce done the traditional way by fermenting soy beans

11:20am: Next was a little known standalone cottage that houses a family of traditional soy sauce makers. Located right next to the police station, the simple one-storey wooden house is surrounded by large earthenware jars filled with fermenting soy. We were greeted by the sight of the rows of jars and the sweet aroma of soy sauce in the air. While we were there, a few villagers strolled in with empty bottles to get their supply of fresh soy sauce or for some fermented soybeans. The little soy sauce shop has been there for over 60 years and is now run by a grandson of the founder.

Stepping into the cottage was like stepping back into a

retro Chinese new village house. An old school 1950s radio which was still working sat on a wall shelf, while an old wind-up clock and black-and-white photos of the family decked the walls. Meanwhile, an old rattan chair sat behind a wooden table where sales were made.

11:40am: After getting a bottle of soy sauce to try, we left Gopeng feeling like we needed to come back again. We had done so much in just 36 hours but we can't wait to return to take on other activities that we had missed such as abseiling, body rafting, visiting the orang asli and caving. But for now, it's time to say goodbye. ●

Bentong used to be a fainéant little town in Pahang, frequented mainly for its famous Chamang waterfall. Languidity courses through its streets amidst a backdrop of tree-filled hills. Still, it was never really on the radar of vacation-seekers until about two years ago. Since then, this century-plus-old town in the middle of Peninsular Malaysia has given many day-trippers from the northern and southern states many a reason to sojourn.

Separated from Kuala Lumpur only by an hour's drive, early-risers could begin with breakfast at the famed Sunday morning market, where you can also bring back bits of Bentong such as *ting ting* candy, dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves and soursops, or Musang King durians when in season. For lovers of night lights, the Bentong Walk night market on Saturdays is the perfect place to find a feel and taste of the local fair and fare.

We chose to drop by one late morning on a Sunday, and found Bentong Walk somewhat subdued. It's a rest day for many of the local vendors here. Apparently, the most happening day is Saturday. Still, guided by Bob Quah, the founder GCC, a community centre here, we managed to unearth some lesser-known local gems while getting updated on some of the oft-blogged hotspots.

Like a bathroom crooner who has just realised his high notes are fit for an audience beyond the shower curtains, Bentong has quite recently woken up to its potential as a tourist attraction and started dressing up for it.

Text and photos **Bianca Lau and Prisca Teh**

Bentong — a sleepy beauty



The public hot spring

No, it's not as gross as the word public might imply. In fact, it lays tranquil, and is not trying to evoke your childhood trauma of a crowded swimming pool, considering how wide the two waterholes stretch, each about half a football field. The natural ponds are half-walled by a mural of sea creatures, despite the water being too hot for any fishy business. Stationed passively under the shady trees, a herb-uncle eagerly waits to tell you about the healing benefits of his offerings of desiccated leaves and barks, and you might even just give his quaint reflexology service a try.



A cleaner pool

Just beside it, an upscale experience of the geothermal treatment awaits you within the private premises of the ēRYAbySURIA Hot Spring Bentong hotel — fashioned as a resort not just for the family but for group retreats too, with options of team-building packages. Non-lodgers need only pay RM10.60 for adults and RM8.50 for children to enjoy the mineral-rich pools with an average temperature of 43°C. Here, you need have no second thoughts about soaking your whole body as the cleanliness is well-maintained. It is also complemented with an ordinary swimming pool and a children's fun-pool.



ēRYAbySURIA Hot Spring Bentong

Lot 2527, Mukim Bentong,
28700 Pahang
T: +609 221 0200
www.eryabysuria.com



So-ya-mmy...

As if from the streets of Penang, a flock surround the Taufu Auntie Mor shop vying for a seat to enjoy the Bentong ginger syrup-infused *tau fu fah* (soya bean curd) which costs only RM1.50 a bowl. All its soya products are freshly made in a processing kitchen behind the shop. Like Christmas ornaments, bags of their signature *tofu pok* hang readily for someone to pick up, which we did. Our only regret was not buying more. They were distinctly denser and fresher compared to our regular supply in KL.

Taufu Auntie Mor
No. 85 & 86, Jalan Chui Yin,
28700 Bentong
T: +6010 903 4443
auntiemok.com.my



Souvenirs galore

If the waft of dried fruit and cuttlefish could scream, Mr Sotong Bentong is every screaming fan at a concert. At centrestage is the star — the Bentong ginger. After generous samplings of iced calamansi and soursop drinks greeting every guest, only the most unabashed would leave empty-handed.

Mr Sotong Bentong
No. 61, Jalan Chui Yin, 28700 Bentong

Smacking snack

Too hot to eat immediately but not as nice when cooled, a sacrifice must be made to fully enjoy this *apam balik* with a texture in between thick and crispy. Under the beating heat of a cloudless day was where we found this stall thriving at the barren street, tempting you to make snacking an addiction. Unlike its Sunday-off fellow vendors, this 15-year-old stall knows no rest.

Apam balik stall
Jalan Chui Yin, 28700 Bentong



Proof “I wuz’ere”

Although the art is faded and only there to reiterate what Bentong has to offer (ginger, durian and a waterfall), the interactive play of optical illusions make this a distinguishable backdrop to prove you have been in Bentong, if you subscribe to the “picture or it didn’t happen” philosophy. The style is more mural than graffiti and inclines towards realism with a hint of impressionism but nevertheless, it is definitely tourism-ministry condoned.

Murals can be found around
Jalan Wayang, off Jalan Dato
Poo Yew Choy, 28700 Bentong





Salty, wet and lickin' good

Mun Zai Salty Wet Chicken takes a wry stance on the classic chicken rice, making it an unprecedented chicken chow. The description itself is felicitously punned from the Cantonese “*ham sap*”, figuratively meaning “horny”. It all started at the Chinese New Year reunion dinner table, where Mun Zai’s father cooked up this succulently-seasoned bird suffused in its herby-juice. The rave reviews from every kin member prompted his wife Madam Low and her son to set up stalls in 2015 in the famous Tong Kee Kopitiam and the adjacent Sun Tong Kopitiam. Priced from RM5.50 to RM11 (for the full thigh) for a single serving with rice, this is one meal we are willing to drive one hour to get. Or you can buy a whole chicken for RM40.

Mun Zai Ham Sap Chicken stall

— **Tong Kee Kopitiam**
No. 4, Jalan Chui Yin,
28700 Bentong

— **Sun Tong Kopitiam**
No. 5, Jalan Chui Yin,
28700 Bentong
T: +6016-990 4587

A contemporary touch

If you miss KL on your journey, head on to the ICU Cornerstone Cafe on the second floor. Mind you, the prices are more KL-like too. Nonetheless, the air-conditioning was an excuse to relish in the home-cooked style meals and be comforted by the cutesy decor that exuberates Pinterest mom vibes. Here, we discovered another only-in-Bentong — the signature ICU chicken is cooked with loads of lemongrass and Bentong ginger (full thigh with rice at RM14.90), complemented by a carafe of “Love at first sight” its branding for jasmine amaranth blooming tea (RM10.90). This was the only place where we caught a glimpse of the almost-extinct youths of Bentong.

ICU Cornerstone Cafe
40A, Tingkat atas, Jalan Chui Yin,
28700 Bentong
T: +60111 544 6946
FB: @icucornerstone



“You might take the possibly acrophobia-inducing suspension bridge where you can people-watch from above.”



The must-come

On the way to the Chamang waterfall, a troop of monkeys sat on the roadside divider like a welcoming party. This is by far the most popular of all places in Bentong, multi-functional for family picnics and barbecues or fishing, under the sunset which makes the water glitter. For a drier approach to view the scenes, you might take the possibly acrophobia-inducing suspension bridge where you can people-watch from above. However, beware of socially-illiterate psychopaths who want to rock the bridge for no apparent reason but to humour themselves. Looking at you who has probably done it before.

From Jan 2019, entrance fees are applicable from 8am to 5pm (adults — RM3, children and senior citizens — RM1.50).



Soil-less farm

Most underrated award goes to MBDC Garden which is a hydroponic farm, but the more intriguing aspects involve the more animated fish farming and beekeeping. Have you ever seen a baby tilapia, let alone schools of them that explode into a frenzy during feeding time? The scene it makes might cause you to furrow your eyebrows but you know you want to see it happen again. After that, the guided tour continues into the vegetable segment of which there is at least an acre manned by only a handful of people. The conspicuous lack of soil helps maintain the neat and futuristic constitution of the farm, eliminating the need for farm boots. We purchased a bag each of its Brazilian spinach and Taiwanese goji and heartily wished we lived next to the farm for an unending supply. The farm offers budget rooms too, including a limited number of water beds.

MBDC Garden
 3.5 Mile, Jalan Chamang,
 28700 Bentong
 T: +6016 610 3919
 FB: @MBDC Bentong

Signature dishes

For dinner, S Cuisine restaurant might seem like the typical Chinese restaurant, but it serves a cuisine that makes you want to come back for more Bentong. We had the steamed chicken in Mirin (Bentong's special soy sauce) that was served with a big bowl of minced and seasoned Bentong ginger, *yong tau foo* with Bentong's signature stuffed *tofu pok* and stir-fried Hong Kong kailan topped generously with preserved vegetable and fried pork lard. The bill for four (with rice, a jug of chrysanthemum tea and a cucumber pickle snack) was RM84.25. We also managed to get a big bottle (1.2kg) of Bentong soy sauce sold there for RM10. ●

S Cuisine
 No. 75-77, Jalan Chui Yin,
 28700 Bentong
 T: +609 222 1731 / +6016 203 1613
 FB: @scuisine



Sunset at
Avani Sepang
Goldcoast

Sepang – the best of both worlds

Home to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and KLIA2, Sepang is the main gateway into Malaysia for most overseas visitors to Malaysia. Modern highways flanked by lush green estates – this is the Malaysia that they see when they first step into the country.

But the state of Selangor is more than just the airports. It forms a large part of the Klang Valley/Greater Kuala Lumpur Southern Growth Corridor.

It is home to Malaysia's first smart city Cyberjaya and the first Digital Free Trade Zone in the world. The F1 International Circuit is also located here. These are juxtaposed

against its natural green and coastal environment, giving Sepang a future-forward yet serene vibe.

Said to be named after the Sepang tree, the district of Sepang borders Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat, Petaling districts and Bandar Baru Nilai in the state of Negeri Sembilan. On the south of Sepang is the Melaka Straits. The district covers Dengkil, Sungai Pelek and Sepang towns.

Most people just pass through Sepang and it may not even cross their minds to visit the place.

What's there to do in Sepang? For Klang Valley folks, it is a mere 30-40 minute drive from Kuala Lumpur city which makes the place ideal for a weekend outing.

Here are some ideas for a day out in Sepang

8:30am: Start by having the first meal of the day when you arrive in the morning. There are numerous choices in Dengkil, Sungai Pelek or Sepang town.

9:30am: Sepang International Circuit – With bellies filled, head off for some fun go-karting at Sepang International Circuit (SIC). There are all sorts of packages ranging from just experiencing the circuits on a quick tour and a 10-minute go-kart ride for the rookie to endurance races. There is even an option of creating your own formats. The Go-Kart Quick Experience offers a 10-minute fun ride on a choice of a Series 1 Kart for beginners or a Series 2 Kart for the more experienced and Series 3 Kart for the professionals. Prices start from RM40 per person for the Series 1 Kart.

For a feel of a real race, come with a group of friends and take part in the Go-Kart Race Adventure Experience which starts from RM150 per person. Designed like an F1 race, there will be Practice, Qualifying and Final rounds with marshalls and race management included. The 12-lap race experience usually takes about an hour.

Then there is the longer Go-Kart Endurance Race for the Le Mans experience where the aim is to get as many laps in within 60 minutes. Price starts from RM300.

Experience what it's like behind the wheels on the track and feel the shot of adrenaline once the lights go green.

Do note that the guided circuit tour takes about 90 minutes and is only available on weekdays. It covers visits to the Grandstand, the Paddock, race control room, media centre and even to the National Automobile Museum. Price for an adult is RM60.



11am: National Automobile Museum –

Cap off the motor racing experience with a visit to the National Automobile Museum where various classic race cars are on exhibit such as The Brushmobile made in 1904, the Ford Speedster made in 1923 and the Alvis Tourer made in 1935. A good part of the two-storey museum is dedicated to the country's achievements in the automotive industry. Entrance is free.

12:30pm: Aunty Aini's Garden Cafe – Everyone must be famished after the excitement at the race tracks. Just 10 minutes away (about 7-8km) from the Sepang F1 Circuit in Kampung Chelet, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan is Aunty Aini's Garden Cafe which is known for its local Malay fare such as *masak lemak cili api* as well as Western dishes. Celebrity chefs Gordon Ramsay and the late Anthony Bourdain have eaten here before – that's how good it is.

3:30pm: Bagan Lalang – Set off for the beach of Bagan Lalang next. It will take about 40 minutes to drive to the beach, passing the town of Sungai Pelek. This beach is probably Sepang's best kept secret. It may not have blue waters and fine white sand but it offers a unique rustic beach experience.

Bagan Lalang's beaches are teeming with life, something beachcombers would appreciate. For instance, you could put your hand into the sand and feel around to dig up some *lala* or clams.

Fishing can also be done at a *kelong* in the middle of the sea but that would have to be an overnight activity.

There are public toilets and showers as well as stalls selling snacks and drinks.

6pm: Perahu, Avani Sepang Goldcoast –

Sepang's coastline is great for sunsets and you could savour one while having a sumptuous dinner at the Perahu restaurant at Avani Sepang Goldcoast Resort. You can dine under its traditional thatched roof or have a table by the beach where you can bask in the glow of the setting sun. Perahu serves BBQ buffets on Friday and Saturday, with an a la carte menu on other evenings.

Avani Sepang features luxury water villas that are built to form the shape of a palm tree extending out into the sea. Besides its F&B offerings, guests can also relax at the Avani Spa, take part in watersports or go on an eco tour such as a mangrove river cruise. Bicycles are also provided for guests to ride around the property.



Also in Sepang



Paya Indah Wetlands

Alternatively, nature lovers could also pay a visit to the Paya Indah Wetlands in Dengkil and visit its resident hippos or just enjoy the 450-ha wetlands. Activities include cycling, nature walks, bird-watching, hippo feeding, croc feeding and others. The wetlands is located next to the ELITE Highway. Travel from Kuala Lumpur will take about 45 minutes.



Mitsui Outlet Park

For those who prefer to stay indoors, how about shopping? Indulge in some bargain shopping for high-end off-season brands at Mitsui Outlet Park, or combine it with Gateway@KLIA2.

The outlet mall has expanded recently and there are now more brands than ever on offer. You could also have a meal there at its popular food court or restaurants. ●

Did you know? – Dragon fruit

Sepang is also known for its dragon fruit. Many of the dragon fruit orchards in the country are located in Sungai Pelek. Once you enter the town on the way to Bagan Lalang, you will see numerous dragon fruit stalls along the main street. Some of the orchards here welcome visitors where you can learn more about the fruit and buy some of the fresh fruit as well as its by-products to take home. Buying the fruit here ensures freshness and sweetness.



DIRECTORY

Sepang F1 Circuit

Jalan Pekeliling,
64000 KLIA, Selangor
E: inquiries@sepangcircuit.com
T: +603 8778 2222
www.sepangcircuit.com/index

Aunty Aini's Garden Cafe

Batu 16, Jalan Sepang
Kampung Chelet, Nilai,
Negeri Sembilan
T: +606 799 1276

Avani Sepang Goldcoast Resort

No. 67, Jalan Pantai Bagan
Lalang, Kampung Bagan
Lalang, 43950 Sungai Pelek,
Selangor
T: +603 3182 3600
E: sepang@avanihotels.com
www.avanihotels.com/en/sepang/restaurants/perahu-restaurant

National Automobile Museum

Sepang International Circuit
Jalan Pekeliling
64000 KLIA
Sepang, Selangor
T: +603 8787 4759 / 1499
www.jmm.gov.my/en/museum/national-automobile-museum

Mitsui Outlet Park KLIA Sepang

Persiaran Komersial,
64000 KLIA, Selangor
Tel: +603 8777 9300
mitsuioutletparkklia.com.my

Paya Indah Wetlands

Department of Wildlife
and National Parks, KM 4,
Jalan Dengkil-Banting
43800 Dengkil, Selangor
T: +603-87687616/8726
www.wildlife.gov.my

The Sepang district in the southern part of Selangor is well-known for hosting high-octane activities in its internationally-renowned racing circuit.

Surrounded by mostly oil palm plantations, the Sepang district is also home to the country's main aviation hub comprising the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and klia2.

In the thick of all the action is the serene oasis that is Serenia City – a 1,775-acre master-planned township development by Sime Darby Property. Development of the well-connected township dubbed as the Garden City of KLIA began in 2013 with an expected completion date of 2035.

To be developed in three main phases, the freehold township is divided into five precincts. The three precincts of Aman Serenia, Bayu Serenia and Puncak Serenia serve as residential components while Cipta Serenia and Citra Serenia are light industrial and the township's town centre respectively.

The site for Serenia City was once known as Ampar Tenang Estate, a tea estate that evolved into rubber and later, oil palm plantations. In paying homage to Ampar Tenang Estate as an important local tea plantation in its heyday, the Serenia City development concept was inspired by the cultivated tea plant *Camellia Sinensis*.



Superior connectivity and accessibility are key features of this community-centric and sustainable development.”
– Idris

This inspiration is creatively reflected in the Serenia City logo, which symbolises sunlight (source of life) surrounded by tea leaves, all of which are rendered in red to portray the energy and vibrancy of the township.

“Serenia City is also built to be sustainable, not just environmentally, but to be able to provide its residents an evolving city that constantly changes with the times,” says Sime Darby Property General Manager of Business Unit 2 Mohd Idris Abdullah, who oversees the development of Serenia City and Bandar Bukit Raja in Klang.

The main draw and unique point of this township is its accessibility. For a start, it is connected via several major highways such as the North-South Expressway Central Link (ELITE) where there is a direct link via the Bandar Serenia Interchange, Maju Expressway (MEX) and the North-South Highway that makes driving to Kuala



Serenia City

shines in the heart of Sepang



Lumpur city a breeze. Additional highways connecting the township include the Putrajaya-Cyberjaya Expressway (FT29) which leads to the Dengkil bypass and also to Puchong. Frequent flyers living in the township can also rejoice since KLIA and klia2 are only a short distance away.

In terms of rail, the Salak Tinggi Express Rail Link (ERL) station is in close proximity to connect commuters to KL Sentral, KLIA and klia2 – the airports are only a stop away from Salak Tinggi station.

“With such convenience, a significant portion – about 30% – of the freehold tract is dedicated to commercial and light industrial properties,” Idris says.

Serene and green

There is no shortage of greenery and open spaces here, with 190 acres allocated for interconnected parklands spread across the township. Cycling and pedestrian paths meander through these parks, in addition to 12 lakes.

At the heart of Serenia City (Citra Serenia) lies the 25-acre central town park that is equipped with ample facilities and amenities ideal for the community. Among them are an amphitheatre, multipurpose

sports courts and retail spaces.

Meanwhile, an adventure park caters to adrenaline junkies with proposed camping grounds, extreme activities and trails nestled among lush vistas.

“All these promotes a walkable community and a healthy and liveable township,” says Mohd Idris.

They are also in line with the developer's commitment to sustainability. Furthermore, the roads in Serenia City follow the natural contours of the land to minimise the need for major earth-cutting, thus preserving the natural landscape.

Sime Darby Property will also aim for some of its commercial buildings to be compliant with the Green Building Index (GBI) Malaysia.

Other amenities in the township include the upcoming The Horizon Village Outlets which lies close to the town centre. Also close by is Xiamen University which is the first overseas campus set up by a major Chinese university. Other educational institutions no more than 15km radius away include Heriot-Watt University, UiTM Dengkil, Manipal College, UKM Bangi and more.

Demand for properties in Serenia City proved unrelenting. Its Serenia Arina double-storey link homes saw a more than 91% take-up rate over a single launch weekend (as of late August 2019).

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Property

From waterfalls to sunsets on a highway



Above: The Rawang Bypass is one of the most serene toll-free highways in the country traversing through the Taman Warisan Negeri Selangor

Facing page: Chasing waterfalls at the Kanching Eco-Forest Park

Rawang would not strike you as a top place to visit but this old town has hidden charms that could take you by surprise.

Text **Rachel Chew**

Photos **Low Yen Yeing**



DID YOU KNOW that Rawang in Selangor was the first town in Malaysia to be lit up by electricity at night? This was thanks to two local tin mining tycoons — Loke Yew and K. Thamboosamy Pillay who installed the first electric generator in the country to power their tin mining operations.

According to Tenaga Nasional Bhd's website, they were also the first to use electric pumps for mining in Malaysia.

All the above happened more than a century ago, in 1894 to be exact, marking the beginnings of the story of electricity in Malaysia.

Due to the tin mining industry, Rawang became one of the most bustling and modern towns in Malaya at that time and travellers who were headed north would take the opportunity to stopover for a break. However, the town's glory days came to an end when tin mining ceased in 1959 following the Japanese Occupation and World War II.

Today, Rawang is still home for many second and third generation descendants of the miners and estate workers. While modern-day Rawang may seem nondescript to some, this quiet unassuming town often surprises visitors with what it has to offer.

Join us on a quick and exciting getaway to uncover the hidden gem that is Rawang.



Nasi lemak kukus in Restoran Teratak Nogori is a popular breakfast choice in Rawang



Soft-boiled egg, kaya and butter toast and local black coffee are the signature offerings of the 70-year-old Ng San Kopitiam



Their blackened charcoal stove cum boiler stands proudly at the back of the restaurant.

8am: The national breakfast

Entering Rawang from Selayang, we were greeted by the refreshing sight of two spectacular forest reserves — Kanching Eco-Forest Park and Templer Forest Park. We chose to visit Kanching after a hearty breakfast and opted for a good old Malaysian classic of smooth *teh tarik* and piping hot *nasi lemak kukus* just 15 minutes away from Kanching Eco-Forest Park at Restoran Teratak Nogori. The humble family-run restaurant known for its simple and delicious *nasi lemak* opens as early as 6am till 4pm every day except Mondays and serves a wide selection of yummy dishes to go with the steamed coconut rice such as duck *rendang* and *ayam salai*, or roasted chicken. It has *lontong* and *roti jala* as well. The shop is often crowded with locals and visitors to the nearby parks.

Another popular breakfast place in Rawang is Ng San Kopitiam which serves up the traditional breakfast staple of kaya buttered toast and soft-boiled eggs. You can speculate about the age of the 70-year-old coffee shop from the way the fluffy loaves of kopitiam bread are stored in a worn glass food cabinet and in the traditional way the bread is grilled over the blackened charcoal stove cum boiler which stands proudly at the back of the shop. The shop opens daily from 7am to 12pm except on Mondays.

9am: Chasing waterfalls

After breakfast we were off for a short and easy hike up to the waterfalls at Kanching Eco-Forest Park. The seven-tiered waterfall and pools filled with fresh water from the limestone hills yonder is a popular recreational spot on weekends. You can enjoy morning hikes in the misty forest trail or have a picnic by the refreshing waterfall. The steps leading to the lower tiers are easy to negotiate if you are not in a hurry but be warned, they could be slippery when wet.

Nature lovers would feel at home in Rawang. Besides the two parks mentioned above, there are also the Commonwealth and Templer Forest Parks. You could go hiking, camping or just have a picnic and enjoy the outdoors.

Noon: A Cantonese feast in the old town

The invigorating waters and fresh air at Kanching had left us famished and we were looking forward to lunch at Restoran Peng Nam. The century-old Cantonese restaurant serves up tasty classics and among its most popular are the sweet and sour pork, tofu and fish with soy bean paste, bitter melon with chicken and fried wontons. But the restaurant's true specialty is not any of these dishes, for it is the steamed white rice that patrons clamour for. Steamed individually in small aluminum bowls, the rice is fluffy yet firm in texture with each grain holding its own. The restaurant opens from 12pm to 7:30pm daily except on Mondays.

2pm: Fruit heaven

We headed for the 2,000-acre Selangor Fruits Valley next. Run by the state government, the fruit farm gives visitors a chance to taste locally grown tropical fruits such as starfruit, mango, rambutan, guava, papaya and pineapple.

Besides fruits, the place also grows herbs and spices, has a deer farm, a mini petting zoo as well as breathtaking views of the valley and its surroundings. Selangor Fruits Valley opens daily except on Fridays from 9am to 4pm.



Selangor Fruit Valley also has a mini petting zoo



One of the many picnic spots at the seven-tiered waterfall in Kanching Eco-Forest Park

4.30pm: The local icy dessert

It was certainly time for some refuelling after gallivanting all over Fruits Valley. Parked along Jalan Welman in town is a little stall selling Yu Yu Ice which in Chinese means “shaken ice”. This traditional homemade flavoured ice scooped into individual cups tastes like sorbet and it certainly hit the right notes on that hot and humid day. Furthermore, Yu Yu Ice stalls are a pretty rare find, so don’t miss the chance to get your fill when in town. The Yu Yu Ice stall opens daily from 11:30am to 5:30pm offering flavoursome choices such as sour plum, red bean and corn.



The Yu Yu Ice stall (above and left) is located along Jalan Welman

Below: Sun Cinema is an old-fashioned cinema that still screens Tamil and Hindi movies

5pm: A stroll in the old street

After lunch we decided to take a leisurely stroll along Jalan Welman, the main street of Rawang town and the Little India of Rawang. Filled with a number of shops selling traditional Indian goods from fabrics and jewellery to household products and food, the shops offer a feast for the senses.

Taking a left turn at the junction of Jalan Welman and Jalan Tokong will lead you to Lorong Taiping, where a standalone cinema in an art deco-style building still screens Tamil and Hindi movies today.



Restoran Teratak Nogori
No. 58, Gerai MPS Batu 16,
48000 Rawang, Selangor
T: +6014 261 1907

Ng San Kopitiam
20, Jalan Welman,
Pusat Bandar Rawang,
48000 Rawang, Selangor

Restaurant Peng Nam
No. 43, Jalan Welman,
48000 Rawang, Selangor
T: +603 6091 6948

Selangor Fruits Valley
KM 7, Jalan Batang Berjuntai,
45600 Rawang, Selangor
T: +6012 343 2971

Yu Yu Ice
Along Jalan Welman,
48000 Rawang, Selangor

Pawagam Sun
No. 100 Lorong Taiping
48000, Rawang,
Selangor
T: +603 6091 5477

Nesan Curry House
40-58, Jalan Welman,
Pusat Bandar Rawang,
48000 Rawang, Selangor
T: +603 6093 1179

Restoran Lan Je
45, Jalan Setia Rawang 1,
Taman Setia Rawang,
48000 Rawang, Selangor
T: +6017 619 1599

“Traversing through the Taman Warisan Negeri Selangor, the third largest park in Peninsular Malaysia, the Rawang Bypass must surely be one of the most scenic toll-free highways in the country.”



The famous tilapia fish served in Restoran Lan Je

5:30pm: Early dinner

We decided to have an early dinner so we could catch what we were told was one of the best sunsets. We opted for the very popular Nesan Curry House in Little India, thronged by locals at any time of the day. Moist *puttu* and plump *appams* are freshly made at the front of the restaurant. The place was crowded and we had to be quick to secure a table before we could digest the wide array of Indian food available — from banana leaf rice to *roti* and *chapati*, you name it, they have it. Something not to be missed is their signature spicy dry-fried chicken or chicken *varuval*. Nesan Curry House opens every day from 7am until 11pm.

If you fancy some local Chinese food instead, you have to try the famous steamed tilapia fish in Restoran Lan Je which has several branches around the Klang Valley but this is where it all began as far back as 1978. They serve individual servings of whole steamed fish and their signature dish is the steamed black tilapia with soy sauce and chopped garlic, ginger and chilli padi.

Restoran Lan Je is open for business for two sessions daily and closes on Tuesdays. The lunch session runs from 11:30am to 3pm and the dinner session is from 5:30pm until 10pm.



The chicken *varuval* is a must when you visit Nesan Curry House

6:30pm: Sunset on the bridge

Leaving Rawang via the elevated Rawang bypass in time for sunset was a great decision. We marvelled at the breathtaking view of the forest canopy seemingly ablaze from the reddish-orange rays of the setting sun.

Traversing through the Taman Warisan Negeri Selangor, the third largest park in Peninsular Malaysia, the Rawang Bypass must surely be one of the most scenic toll-free highways in the country.

The highway opened to traffic at the end of 2017. It features a 2.7km elevated viaduct with the tallest pillar standing at 58.2m, the highest of its kind in Malaysia. The highway offers road users a different vantage of the park and the feeling of driving above treetops. ●

Dried shrimp, wetlands and new horizons

A relaxed drive to the seafood-rich town of Tanjung Sepat with additional off-the-grid explorations proves that the journey is the destination.

Text and photos **Jun Kit**

A languid angler at Lover's Bridge



THE COASTAL TOWN of Tanjung Sepat, Selangor located about 100km southwest of Kuala Lumpur, should not only be recommended as an easily-accessible and value-for-money destination for seafood indulgence, but also as a choice locale for day-tripping urbanites craving the rare seaside experience. Set against a small town backdrop that still feels intrinsically local, it remains unperturbed by mass tourism.

The two-hour drive from Kuala Lumpur is anything but monotonous, should you choose to take the roads less travelled. Leisurely stops along the way — to a random beach or the secluded nook at the edge of the map — will reward you with a sense of wonderment and discovery.

Without much preparation and having the benefit of time across a long weekend, we decided to drive ourselves there to spend a night, being mindful to keep the pace slow — but the curiosity on high.

Sun-scorched Pantai Kelanang



Colours of an ABC

DAY ONE

11am: We set forth late in the morning with a leisurely drive to Banting town, looking for a meal along the way without an idea of where to eat. Along the road, Malay-style *warungs* were spotted sporadically but nothing caught our eye — there was no lunchtime crowd and most places seemed closed. Do people here not eat out on Sunday afternoons? Granted, we didn't do our research on "Banting specialities", so we decided to drive onwards in hopes for more exciting options.

1:30pm: At Pantai Kelanang, we stretched our legs, the salty scent of sea breeze making us urban dwellers giddy with excitement — murky waters notwithstanding. It was merely a short distance away from familiarity but even the air seemed different. A languid lull permeated the atmosphere; cement gazebos housed napping families, campsite picnickers lay relaxed underneath stretches of casuarina, embers from their barbecue fading out and little stalls offering toys, snacks, and even cheap haircuts appeared makeshift and casual. At a hawker centre with predictably standard fare, we ordered *nasi paprik* with an ABC to cool things off. It had started to feel like a holiday.

3pm: Our journey continued via an inner coastal road, south-east towards Morib. With the view of the straits blocked by palm oil plantations and shrubbery, we had to be content with only the fantasy of driving parallel to the ocean with the windows down, like in the movies. Scrutinising Google Maps, we realised that there was another smaller road closer to the water's edge. With time on our hands and a lust for adventure, we decided to make a detour into this mysterious inner road. The car weaved through kampung lots (some charmingly rustic), shacks selling provisions, and sun-dappled grids of palm before crossing a rusty irrigation channel and finally reaching the coastal road proper — it was more like a little lane for motorcycles, too precarious for cars. At that moment, we were alone in this deserted space facing the muddy Malacca Strait. We imagined that this must surely be a rather popular spot for village folks craving solitude or privacy. No doubt it would be an amazing experience to bike through this secluded stretch with panoramic views of the setting sun all to yourself.

3:30pm: We continued our drive, making a pitstop at Morib beach, where there were plenty of paved walkways, playgrounds, food stalls and signboards warning visitors against unlawful sexual relations. There was a “Karnival Usahawan” when we visited — resembling a cross between a Ramadhan bazaar and an agricultural expo — selling traditional herbs, fertilisers and medicinal roots such as Tongkat Ali. The highlight for me had to be the “Pameran Lembu Sado” exhibit of cows as big as a MyVi, munching lazily on grass in large shaded containers, proudly displayed by local rearers. This was clearly a very popular spot for families — many congregated at the food stalls. We joined them and ordered some fruit, coconut water and fried calamari, and indulged in some people-watching. The proper beachfront with resorts — the spot for 90s family vacations — was a short drive away, if you're interested in branded accommodation.



Road less travelled: A Google Map Street View of the scenic motorcycle lane south of Pantai Kelanang

5pm: The craving for beach did not diminish as we made yet another impromptu stop at a seaside locale — this time at Pantai Cunang, a charming and rustic beach enclave managed by the Mah Meri, the indigenous tribe renowned for their woodwork and crafts. The entrance to the beach was a showcase of their creative spirit, with sweetly endearing decor of cherry blossoms and roses crafted from plastic waste. Within the grounds were huts for rent, built by the villagers. There were not many visitors in sight, save for groups of local kids and fishermen in the distance, along with their dogs — packs of happy, though slightly intimidating, canines.

Walking further into the shallow shorefront, the landscape somehow changed to a destitute grey and blue, with the skeletons of dead mangrove trees punctuating the sand-swept panorama. It was beautiful and surreal — the expanse of nature, with flocks of sandpipers whirling around, following the movement of the wind. Strips of water flowed into eroded pathways in the sand, creating silvery snaking shapes reflecting the sky as the tides changed. Sandwiched between the earth and the sky, we couldn't have been more removed from the reality of the city's concrete and steel.



Conference of birds and dramatic waterscapes at Pantai Cunang



Orang asli decorations at Pantai Cunang (left); barren and otherworldly edges of Pantai Cunang (below) and tacky fun at Tanjung Sepat town (bottom)



6pm: Tanjung Sepat town — finally! — located just moments away from Pantai Cunang. It felt quite “new villagey”. We made a stop at Qingren Qiao, a gift shop surrounded by kitschy decor items and amusing structures which serve as touristic photo ops (twin towers made out of liquor jars, anyone?). The shop specialised in local snacks and produce from the sea — fish maw and dried seafood being popular options. We stocked up on condiments, dried shrimp and anchovies, much fresher and better value than in KL. The shop and kitschy area was a remnant of the once popular but now collapsed tourist landmark, labelled the “ *Lover’s Bridge* ”, which is now rebuilt nearby as a jetty. Apparently there is a popular tourist stop called Memory Lane nearby, with near-exact George Town mural rip-offs and another branch of the same gift shop, but we decided to skip it for sunset views on the jetty instead.

“A flying macaw took that moment to surprise and dazzle. It belonged to a local resident who takes it out for flights the same way you would walk your dog.”



7pm: The new “ *Lover’s Bridge* ”, a long concrete jetty lined with lamp posts, was bustling with activity. Holding a very concentrated passion fruit juice sold by an auntie at the entrance to the jetty (at a discount, as it was “late”), we walked out into the waves. The skies were a gorgeous crimson and the breeze strong. A flying macaw took that moment to surprise and dazzle. It belonged to a local resident who takes it out for flights the same way you would walk your dog. Some people dangled fishing rods. Many just wanted to enjoy the stiff breeze, smiling for selfies. It was an uplifting moment for all.

8pm: For dinner, there seemed to be numerous seafood restaurants available but we opted to go to one recommended by the cashier at the gift shop, Asam Batu Laut Restaurant. Those who prefer dining to a view of the ocean could opt to arrive here earlier or come for lunch. The restaurant, like many in the area, specialised in shellfish, molluscs and of course fish from the Tanjung Sepat waters. The menu was halal. Non-halal options are aplenty within the town itself — a restaurant that came recommended several times was Tanjung Sepat Ocean Seafood.

After dinner, we drove back to town and slept it off at Gano Homestay.

DAY TWO

12:30pm: We woke late after sleeping in — it was that sort of a holiday. By the time we stepped out, it was already noon. Time for claypot *bak kut teh* (with seafood ingredients!) at Ah Hock Bak Kut Teh — a Tanjung Sepat speciality. Food may run out before noon, so get there early or call beforehand, we were told (they open from 7am until sold out). Chunks of Spanish mackerel and a generous serving of unpeeled prawns were served with the usual porky slices and herbal broth, and tasted scrumptious.

We explored the streets after the meal and were taken by the old-school small town atmosphere. Not many signs of tourists, though there were vendors offering colourful yam-sweet potato crisps and other snacks tinged with nostalgia.

2pm: Next, we patronised the casual looking Vietnam Kopitiam for drip coffee and bread with kaya. The owners — a man and his Vietnamese wife, were very welcoming and chatty. Don’t expect “cafe interiors” — this is a no-fuss, homey establishment that would make you feel like you have reverted back to the old days of afternoon siestas at your late grandfather’s wooden and zinc-roofed home.

Ah Hock Seafood Bak Kut Teh
2260, 7, Jalan Besar,
Pekan Tanjung Sepat,
42800 Tanjung Sepat,
Selangor
T: +6019 606 6288

Asam Batu Laut Restaurant
Kampung Batu Lapan,
Tanjung Sepat, Selangor
T: +6019 384 4362

Gano Farm
Lot 700, Jalan Laut Membiru,
Taman Pelangi, 42800
Tanjung Sepat, Selangor
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Burning with passion? Sunset at Lover's Bridge

3pm: We decided to try the *pau*, supposedly a famed snack, at Hai Yew Heng Pau. It was *okok only*. The charming aspect, however, was that we could view the workers making fresh *paus* within the shop proximity in gregarious *auntie* fashion.

3:30pm: We visited Lee's Cocoa, a local chocolatier that we just stumbled upon whilst exploring beyond the more popular streets. The shop was almost like an office showcasing wares, with a little seating area for guests who want to savour desserts like gluten-free chocolate cake or bubble tea. The owner explained that the products were made with cocoa beans sourced from his family's five-acre garden, the only remaining cocoa plantation in Tanjung Sepat. We left with a pack of unsweetened raw cocoa nibs (RM17.90/100g — crunchy and bitter) and 75% dark chocolate (RM18.90/100g — their best seller).

4:30pm: Time to leave, but not before one last bout of shopping, this time at Gano Farm (our homestay) itself. I am almost certain that this is a pitstop for tour groups who need to stock up on mushroom-based ointments and health supplements — things like black *lingzhi* mushroom or herbal rubs. The retail space was huge and well stocked but we were more interested in the chiller display that sold Gano Farm-grown mushrooms and fungi — monkey head, oyster and wood ear fungus to name a few.

We then headed back to KL, disregarding our FOMO (fear of missing out), for there were many other things to experience here, including dragon fruit plantations and an agro-tourism centre, but this trip had already been fruitful. We set off, armed with not only snacks, condiments and a happy tummy but also a newfound perspective of Malaysia's undiscovered and hidden coastal landscape. ●



Tanjung Sepat town vignettes (clockwise from top left): Seafood *bak kut teh*; grilles and a long fingernail; yam and sweet potato crisps; Vietnamese drip coffee at a local *kopitiam*

Offbeat outings to **Setapak**

Looking for a half-day outing but don't know where to go? If you want new nooks to uncover, experiences off the beaten path and something memorable for the taste buds, we invite you to explore Setapak in Malaysia's capital of Kuala Lumpur (KL).

The literal definition of Setapak, translated from Malay, is "one step". Some say it has been so named because it is just a stride away from KL city centre at its southern border.

Unless you are a student or staff of the Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) in Setapak, the closest you have been to the populous suburb is probably Zoo Negara where the thriving panda pair could fulfill your quota of cuteness for the week.

So you may be wondering, what else does Setapak have in store? This is where we would like to surprise you.

An international tourist spot

If you were a local and you hadn't been to the **Royal Selangor Visitor Centre** in Setapak, it's time to drop by. Listed as a tourist attraction, your overseas friends could probably tell you more about this "world's finest pewter museum" than you.

If you are coming from Jalan Genting

Kelang, the main artery of Setapak, you will know you are heading in the right direction when you pass by **PV21** on your right, a prominent condominium with red vertical strips. Built by Platinum Victory Holdings, the PV or Platinum brand is ubiquitous in Setapak, where the well-reputed developer is a household name for the residential and commercial developments here.

"For Platinum Victory, Setapak is like our homeground, where we have been the prime mover of its growth for as long as 20 years now," says PV executive director Gan Yee Hin.

Perfect for a half-day out, there are a number of interesting things to see and do in the Royal Selangor Visitor Centre.

There are professional guides to not just direct you around the museum, but also tell you stories that breathe life into the many artefacts on display. Among the highlights is the Lucky Teapot, and the true tale of why it is so named. Another exhibit not to be missed is the 9.1m replica of the Petronas Twin Towers

made from 7,000 pewter tankards. Outside, a giant replica of the tankard is the top selfie-spot here.

Also check out the Science Discovery Gallery and the Live Craftmanship Showcase where you get a close-up of the pewter-making process.

For a fee of RM65, the School of Hard Knocks offers an unforgettable experience where you get to hammer the malleable metal alloy into a bowl, complete with your name engraved. If you are more ambitious, you can try your hand at the Foundry Workshop, where you get to shape three items of any kind to bring home. This involves molten pewter, so only those aged 15 and above can join, at RM180 per pax.

When you're ready for a break, the in-house cafe here serves some real delectables. Our favourites are the flavourful *asam laksa* and the homemade Guinness cake. Entrance is free and parking is free, so there is no excuse for you not to make a trip here.



The Retail Showroom of the Royal Selangor Visitor Centre gives visitors a chance to buy pieces of pewter beauty to take home as souvenirs



PV21 paints the Setapak skyline with strips of red to point the way to the Royal Selangor Visitor Centre

The latest attraction in Titiwangsa is the water park, where entrance is free



PV13 is one of the many landmark high-rises by Platinum Victory spread throughout Setapak

Renovated recreation

Titiwangsa Lake Park is another main attraction in Setapak. Having been closed for more than a year for upgrading as part of the River of Life project, the park under KL City Hall was reopened in Dec 2019, with almost a total makeover, including more than 1,600 newly-planted trees of various species.

New attractions include a children's water park and a well-equipped disabled-friendly playground. Special-needs children are encouraged to make use of the facilities here.

For those attempting to hit 10,000 steps a day, there are two tracks, a canopy walk to enjoy the Titiwangsa Range view, a mini eco-forest and a maze garden.

For more kinetic activities, a badminton court and a netball court are provided here. You can go canoeing in the massive lake that has a fountain jet that can shoot up to 100m.

For lunch, we highly recommend the **Setapak Teochew Restaurant** located 1km away. Its specialties include the steamed sea fish, the fried *pek gek* (stir-fried chewy flat dough cake noodle), teochew white noodle and teochew-style *kuay teow* with preserved vegetables. The fish cake, spring roll and fish balls are popular orders too.

Traditional bites like the teochew wedding biscuits (with lotus paste and red bean paste fillings), sesame roll biscuits, mung bean pastry and peanut candy are laid out around the shop, tempting you to take them home.



The appetising pomfret meehoon is one of the reasons the Setapak Teochew Restaurant has acquired an increasingly loyal following



IGO Pet Cafe offers cuddles from 15 "best friends"

The salted egg yolk chicken burger in Tree Garden Cafe tastes as mouth-watering as it looks



Far right: A double-ceiling height in Tree Garden Cafe makes for a comfortable dining experience



Cafe hops and thrift shops

You can either do this in one day as all the highlighted spots are located in a cluster, or in two separate days at a more relaxed pace – for your wallet as well as your digestion.

For this outing, start at **PV128**. The four-storey commercial centre has been built to complement the **PV13** apartment block right next to it. The food selection in PV128 ranges from a simple RM5 *nasi blagak ikan* to cheese naan pizza, curry salmon *meehoon*, Portuguese chicken bread bowl (yes, the "bowl" can be eaten), Korean abalone porridge and many more.

We zoomed into **Tree Garden Cafe** to share a salted egg chicken burger and

chocolate shaved ice. The salted egg sauce comes separately to allow you to spread as much or as little over the whole-piece chicken meat. This family-run food joint takes pride in serving quality ingredients, and we intend to come again to enjoy the tomyam and fish and chips, both cooked with Alaskan cod fish. For something different, the blueberry chicken sandwich is another chef's recommendation here.

Next, take the escalator to the first floor for some pet therapy at **IGO Pet Cafe**. Buy a drink (minimum RM9.90) by way of an entrance fee, and you get to spend as much time as you like with 15 dogs – from Pomeranians to Beagles and even a Chow Chow.

SETAPAK

After your fill of fluff, drive around the corner to **Baden Baden Bundle Setapak** for some retail therapy at a fraction of the normal prices. Touted as a sustainable practice, thrift shopping is trending. With a measure of patience, go forth on a treasure hunt around this two-storey warehouse for some pre-loved branded clothes, shoes, bags, headgear and accessories. At the checkout, a discount is usually given, where we got shoes cut down to RM10 from the tags' RM12.90 and a trench coat for RM25 from RM29.90.

The next destination is **Jalan Jalan Japan**, which opened its newest branch last year in M3 Shopping Mall. Coming from Jalan Genting Klang, you will pass by an ongoing Rumawip project by PV named **Residensi Wilayah – Vista Wirajaya 1 & Vista Wirajaya 2** at the junction to TAR UC. An upcoming residential project by PV lies opposite the tertiary institute. Launched in October 2019, **PV9** is strategically located with direct access to major highways such as the DUKE and SPE.

Adjacent to Taman Melati LRT station, Gan says PV9 will surely appeal to both upgraders and investors alike, especially those who understand the potential of student rental. Priced from RM530,000, he expects the project to receive 100% take-ups soon, as with most PV developments around Setapak and the Klang Valley.

A short distance from the future PV9 is where you will find M3 Shopping Mall. On its third floor, the big bright inviting shop selling second-hand items from Japan is hard to miss.

If you are looking for winter wear, we suggest you take a look here first – where you may get 10 coats for the price of one in a normal shop. Kimono wear and Japanese clogs are available here too, and the whole outfit may cost you only RM20.

You can easily spend more than two hours browsing through the rows upon rows of apparel, footwear, pouches, soft toys and even pots and pans.

For brunch nearby, try **Kelate Kitchen** at Plaza Prima Setapak. We got the fried fish *nasi kukus* with a rich spiced topping and some freshly fried chilli potato slices, all for only RM8. The *ayam berempah* and *nasi special kambing bakar*, plus the *teh tarik madu* are big hits here. Be prepared to queue during peak hours.

For tea after shopping, we went to a humble road side stall dubbed **Rojak Pasembur Best Setapak** five minutes away. Best or not, the rich peanut gravy on the fried fritters, hard-boiled egg, cucumber and bean sprouts were satisfying enough.



PV9 is slated to be another iconic marker in Setapak when it is unveiled in 2022



Pleasant surprises wait to be uncovered in Baden Baden Bundle



Above: The *teh tarik madu*, said to be sweetened with wild honey, has many making a beeline for Kelate Kitchen



Above right: Yukatas at bargain prices, and a host of other modern Japanese fashions in Jalan Jalan Japan



Right: The *twang* in the peanut gravy makes this rojak pasembur a smacky snack



Platinum Walk is one of the main commercial hubs developed by PV



A spread in Campbell Road Ban Kee that will satisfy any seafood aficionado



The signature char kuey teow at Mali's Corner

For a good night's sleep

There was a time when people, young and old, from around the Klang Valley would frequent Setapak for a day out. The draw was the **hot water spring in Setapak**. Besides soaking in all the therapeutic goodness of the naturally heated pool, part of the fun was in boiling eggs in the pool and gobbling them up after that. Yes, you can still enjoy the aqua treatment in the same spot, but the hot spring is now housed within Resource Springs Apartment where non-residents pay RM2 to soak their feet in the mineral-rich water piped into tiled channels.

No soaking is allowed in the main pool though, which perhaps explains why the water looks clean. However, we can't say the same for the bathrooms. So our advice is to bring your own towel to dry yourself after.

To treat a hungry tummy, how about a seafood treat? The famous **Campbell Road Ban Kee Restaurant** is just a 10-minute drive away. You will have a hard time picking from 10 flavours of meaty crabs, ranging from



The Danau Kota Lake Park with PV10 (on the right) in the background

salted egg and curry leaf to salt and pepper. Complement your choice with claypot *lo shu fen* and fried malabar spinach. Balitong lovers would be delighted to know the succulent shellfish can be savoured here.

As a pre-amble to your foot spa here, we suggest giving your feet a workout at the **Danau Kota Lake Park**, just an 8-minute drive away. Jog round the track and enjoy the calmness of the lake, the lush trees and chirping birds. Thanks to PV's contribution, the recently upgraded park also has a new playground and amphitheatre.

If you need some fuel before the exercise, the **Platinum Walk** (yes, also built by PV) seven minutes away offers an array of F&B. Among them, **Mali's Corner Char Kuey Teow (CKT)** is a favourite for its "CKT basah", nasi lemak *ayam goreng* and laksa Kedah.

Or you can be among the first to explore an emerging ultrahip retail centre dubbed **The Palette**, just next to Danau Kota Park. Built and managed by PV, the seven-acre hub anchored by AEON BiG has added a fresh vibe to the matured district. ●

 **PLATINUM VICTORY**
Creating Magical Moments



Durian 101

Text **Vanessa Surian** / *Illustrations* **Jun Kit**



Introduction

This is a durian, so named because of the “ouchy” spikes or “duri” all over its husk. Thorny on the outside and smelly on the inside, it is indeed baffling why this fruit is referred to as the “King of Fruits”.



Varieties

The fruit’s formidable thorn-covered rind can range from green to brown, and its delicious flesh can be white, pale yellow or even bright red, depending on the species. Popular varieties include some odd monikers such as Musang King (the name has nothing to do with the *musang* or civet cat but the place where it originated from: Gua Musang in Kelantan), Red Prawn, Kucing Tidur, D24 and Black Thorn, all bearing their own distinctive tastes.



How to choose

To select the “just-right” durian, first, smell it. A ripe durian must have a smell which is not overpowering.

Next, give it a good shake and listen out for dull, soft knocks of the seeds inside. No sound means still unripe while too noisy means overripe.



Durian 101

The art of opening

Inside the shell are five sections with cavities that create swollen curves on the shell's outer skin, indicating where the custardy fruit lies within. Each of the sections is divided by a soft pith, and the most common method of breaching the prickly fruit involves sticking a knife into the hull along one of these seams, and levering the soft white pith open to reveal the edible flesh within.

There are viral tales of people wholly unfamiliar with the durian who meticulously shaved all the thorns off, only to be faced with the perplexing sight of soft white rind instead of fleshy fruit.

In the past, a stake from the guava tree was said to be an effective tool in opening a durian due to the nature of its hard wood.

Today, you can still find blunt stakes of unspecified types of wood for sale as durian openers.

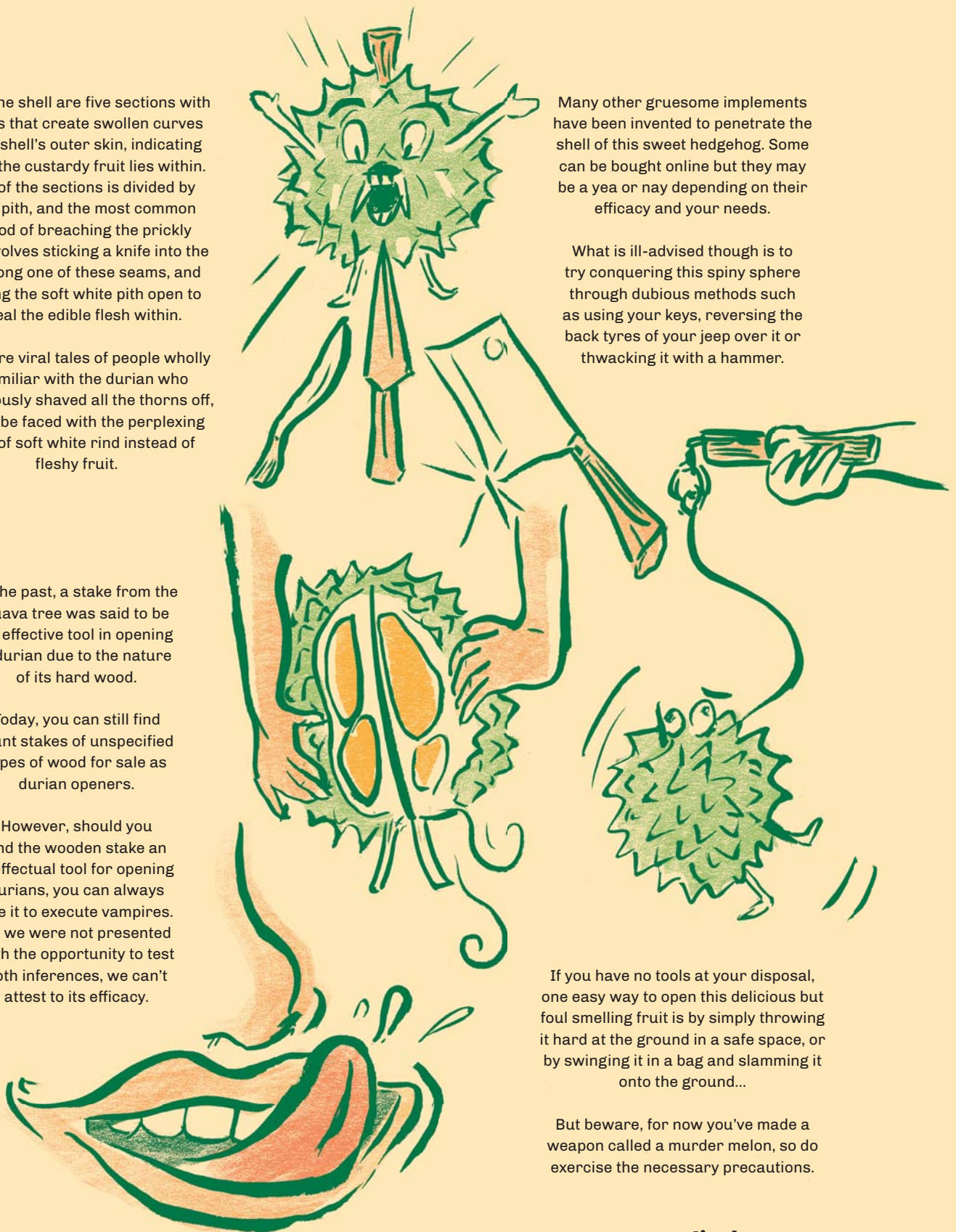
However, should you find the wooden stake an ineffectual tool for opening durians, you can always use it to execute vampires. As we were not presented with the opportunity to test both inferences, we can't attest to its efficacy.

Many other gruesome implements have been invented to penetrate the shell of this sweet hedgehog. Some can be bought online but they may be a yea or nay depending on their efficacy and your needs.

What is ill-advised though is to try conquering this spiny sphere through dubious methods such as using your keys, reversing the back tyres of your jeep over it or thwacking it with a hammer.

If you have no tools at your disposal, one easy way to open this delicious but foul smelling fruit is by simply throwing it hard at the ground in a safe space, or by swinging it in a bag and slamming it onto the ground...

But beware, for now you've made a weapon called a murder melon, so do exercise the necessary precautions.



Durian 101

Aaah, that memorable pong fragrance!

The unmistakable and pervasive smell that emanates from durians has gotten it banned from public transportation, hotels and other public venues. Durians have twice caused evacuations in Australian universities due to fears that the fetid odour of the fruit was a gas-leak.

Never present an obstacle between a durian-lover and the majestic fruit. If someone near you is enjoying a ripe and rank durian, do not call in a bomb squad. As the popular adage goes, “if you can’t beat them, join them”, so jump in and eat a piece too, and perhaps you won’t notice the stench as much. Else, simply move away to a safe distance upwind from the location.

The late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, who enjoyed consuming the stinky fruit, said that eating durian makes the breath smell (and we paraphrase here) as if one has been in too close a proximity to one’s grandmother who had passed on. Another Anthony, novelist Anthony Burgess, writes that eating durian is “like eating sweet raspberry blancmange in the lavatory”.

Avoid wearing gas masks in front of or contemplating violent reprisals against durian addicts, perhaps using the aforementioned weapon — the murder melon — as durian advocates are large in numbers and a tad overzealous.



Durian 101

Other than au naturel

There are other ways to enjoy the spiky fruit. From ice-cream and cendol, to cakes and pastries, there are many sweet treats that utilise durians' unique flavour to elevate its taste.



The seeds are edible too, once they have been cooked. They make yummy snacks after being boiled or roasted, or cut into thin slices and deep fried into crispy chips.



For those who prefer savoury dishes, try the fermented durian or *tempoyak sambal*, to be eaten with rice.



However, it would be prudent to avoid drinking alcoholic beverages when eating durian as there have been reports of individuals who have died after consuming wine with durian.



Durian 101

All good things in moderation

Enjoy your sweet malodorous treat, but do avoid excess indulgence.

Two segments of the flesh are equivalent to eating one ripe banana, while five segments are equivalent in calories to one bowl of rice. Over-indulging in 15 segments, for example, takes your calorie count to 625 kcal, equivalent to three bowls of rice. Unless you plan to skip some meals after your durian feast, enjoy it in moderation.

Ease the heat

Traditional belief claims that the durian has warming properties, sometimes called "heatiness" and is liable to cause excessive sweating.

A practice said to balance out the heatiness is by drinking water from the empty husk after eating the creamy flesh within. Or counter the heatiness with the cooling properties of coconut water or mangosteens.

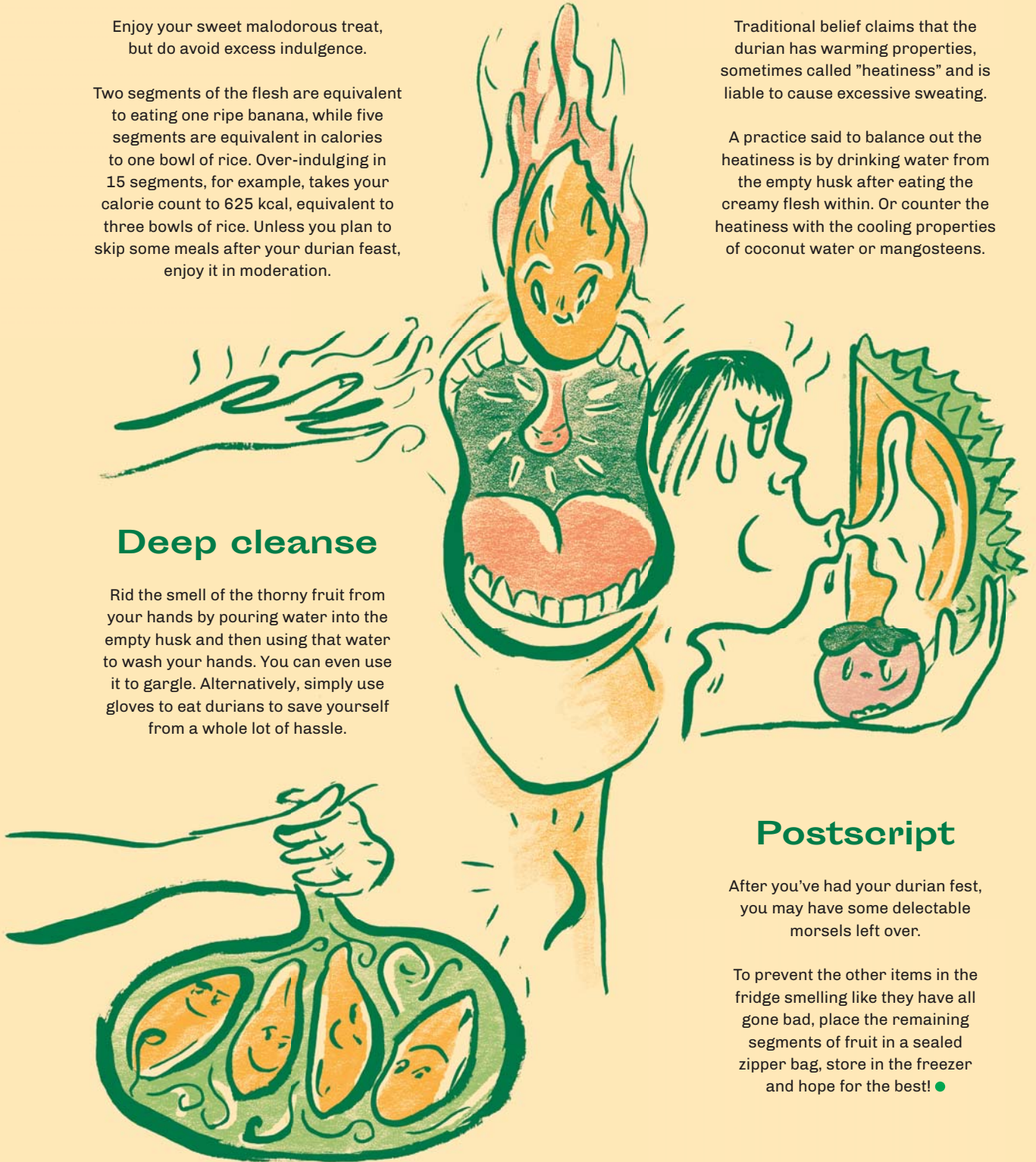
Deep cleanse

Rid the smell of the thorny fruit from your hands by pouring water into the empty husk and then using that water to wash your hands. You can even use it to gargle. Alternatively, simply use gloves to eat durians to save yourself from a whole lot of hassle.

Postscript

After you've had your durian fest, you may have some delectable morsels left over.

To prevent the other items in the fridge smelling like they have all gone bad, place the remaining segments of fruit in a sealed zipper bag, store in the freezer and hope for the best! ●



Zee

***Home is where
her heart is***

*— After living
beyond Malaysia's
borders for more
than a decade,
singer-songwriter
Zee Avi comes
home to roost.*

Text **Anita Kandhavel**

Photos **Daniel Adams**

avi





With a voice as rich as molasses and smooth as silk, it is no wonder that Izyan Alirahman — better known as Zee Avi to the masses — has progressively accumulated a global fan base. Yet, for all the old soul and relaxed yesteryear vibe that pulses through her singing, in person, the Sarawak-born singer-songwriter exudes a sense of energy borne out of irrepressible hope and humorous charm, her infectious laugh never far away and frequently revealing itself during the course of our conversation.

I

IT WAS ZEE WHO co-wrote and sang *Arena Cahaya*, the original soundtrack for the Malaysian box-office hit *Ola Bola* which was voted “Best Original Song” at the prestigious 53rd Annual Golden Horse Film Awards in Taiwan. The song also won the “Best Original Theme Song” award at the 28th Malaysia Film Festival in 2016. Although originally based in Los Angeles, her innate talent, free spirit and affinity for travel have seen Zee tour extensively, strutting her stuff at prestigious festivals around the world and headlining shows. Having released two albums and an EP to date with another album on the cusp of launch, the singer has returned home to Malaysia after years abroad, excited to explore opportunities for the future, especially in collaboration with young local talents.

Ironically, Zee’s foray into the world of music is not the typical tale of an artiste who was single-minded about pursuing her craft from an early age. Just as she stood on the threshold of her teens, Zee was uprooted from her hometown of Miri when her father’s growing business interests necessitated the family’s relocation to Kuala Lumpur. Despite her upheaval from familiar surroundings, Zee led a normal teenage life and even taught herself how to play the guitar when she was 17.

Notwithstanding persuasions to read law, Zee enrolled instead to study arts and fashion in London. However, she did not take to that either and found herself back on home shores facing an existential crisis at the tender age of 21! One day, to combat her melancholy and in an effort to distract herself from the uncertainties in her life, Zee picked up her guitar and wrote her first song, *Poppy*. She posted *Poppy* on YouTube and after receiving many positive reviews, Zee was encouraged to write and post additional songs.

Over time however, the singer got disenchanted and shared what she resolved was to

be her last song on YouTube on the eve of her 22nd birthday. But as we all know, life can sometimes take a turn for the unexpected and in a twist of fate that would have surprised even the sprites of serendipity, the song attracted so much interest that offers from management companies and record labels came pouring in. Zee happily accepted a record deal, nose-dived into a career in music and the rest, as they say, is history.

Live! What winds of change have brought you home?

Zee Avi: The food! In particular, mum’s amazing *ulam* with Sarawak *belacan*. It feels like I’ve been hungry for 10 years! But jokes aside, the creative landscape has changed and progressed tremendously in Malaysia from the time I first ventured into music. There is so much local talent here especially in the underground music scene. The younger generation of Malaysians are so courageous and bold in expressing themselves and they do not defer to other people’s expectations of them. These young artistes inspire me to be unapologetic about my own expressions too, and moving forward as an independent singer, I want to commit fully to my creative freedom. I want to experiment sonically, refine my stories and delve further into my artistic identity. And I’m very excited to collaborate with our young local talents.

How would you classify your music?

I’m not constrained by any one genre. Firstly, I’m constantly growing and evolving but to me, music is divine and I’m just channelling the message at any given point in time. For now, I would describe my music as post-modern minimal romantic.

“I’m more of a live performer than a studio artiste as I thrive from the energy released by people coming together to enjoy music.”

Everchanging

A mixtape by Zee Avi, exclusive for Live!



1. Brown Eyed Girl – Van Morrison
2. Seabird – Alessi Brothers
3. Summer Breeze – The Main Ingredient
4. Someday We'll All Be Free – Donny Hathaway
5. I Need To Be In Love – The Carpenters
6. Akai Unmei – Momoe Yamaguchi
7. Nocturne No. 1 in B-Flat Minor, Op No. 1 – Frederic Chopin
8. Ballade de Melody Nelson – Serge Gainsbourg & Jane Birkin
9. Je Te Veux – Erik Satie
10. Minor Swing – Django Reinhardt
11. Good Morning Heartache – Billie Holiday
12. Cry Me A River – Julie London
13. Ce matin là – Air

What inspires your lyrics?

I’m a storyteller with a cultural articulation strongly rooted in Borneo. I live my words and in the beginning, I largely wrote about my experiences. My songs are a harbour in which to comfort myself and offer hope that things will always get better. Now my lyrics reflect my perspective on the world, focusing on the relationship with self, relationships with others and our connection with nature, but mostly, they explore where we are now as a collective. So, basically I open myself, look within, receive the message and deliver the story.

Name a few of your leading musical influences.

Oh, there are so many as I have an eclectic taste in music. It was Billie Holiday though who inspired me to first start singing but legends like Ella (Fitzgerald) and Karen Carpenter have strongly influenced my musical taste and inclinations. In truth, I have a great affinity for music that precedes 1979.

Tell us about your upcoming album.

It’s called *Ellipses* after my favourite punctuation; dot, dot, dot, since it denotes continuity and sums up my belief that we must always learn, grow and never remain static. Blending an array of genres, the album revolves around the power of three. It has three different vibes and is made up of nine songs which I wrote over the past seven years. Its first single is titled *Who are U?* and was released on Malaysia Day 2019. The album is also rather special to me as it includes collaborations with friends.

Who makes up your fan base and what do you want them to take away from your music?

I love talking about my fans! Statistics show that my fan base is very wide and ranges from the young to the old. I don’t follow trends, instead my music comes from the heart and from my life experiences. And since our experiences connect us all in some way irrespective of our beliefs or backgrounds, my songs resonate with many people, cutting across gender, age, geography and other boundaries. It’s absolutely rewarding to have someone from say, South Africa, tell me that they have lived my lyrics and that my songs have uplifted or inspired them. My lyrics are real and it means the world to me that my fans and I are connected through my music.

Do you have a favourite amongst your songs? Is there a crowd favourite?

I have no real favourites as they all hold a certain value to me. That said, I love singing *Kantoi* as it’s a perennial favourite and is always so well received wherever I perform it. There have been numerous covers of this song and there has been a renewed surge of interest in *Kantoi* especially among Generation Z in Indonesia.

What is the best show or festival that you have performed at? What do you like most about playing live?

Rainforest World Music Festival 2012, because not only did I get to perform in my hometown, but this is a festival that I love and one I have been going to since very young. To be able to play on that stage where I got to curate my sound to adapt to the world music sound was an amazing experience.

What I love most about playing live is 100% the audience and the symbiosis we share. I always say that I’m more of a live performer than a studio artiste as I thrive from the energy released by people coming together to enjoy music.

What would you like to share with up-and-coming young artistes?

Like anything worth your while, it takes hard work to succeed. I always tell new artistes that the easiest part is to get on stage and sing because that’s fun. The hard work starts after you get off that stage. You have to keep learning, keep growing, practise good work ethic and always be true to yourself. If your music comes from a sincere place, even the language won’t matter. Whether the lyrics are in English, Malay or even “Manglish” (portmanteau of Malay and English), they will touch your listeners as music transcends all barriers. My recurring advice to newcomers is this, “If you’re doing it for fame, then you’re doing it for the wrong reasons.” You must love what you are doing and you are never too old for your passion to find you!

Is there gender-bias in this industry? Do female artistes face additional challenges in Malaysia?

The industry is definitely male dominated but happily, things are changing. I would love to see more female musicians, producers and songwriters as each gender definitely brings different qualities to the divine art of music.

You consciously advocate eco-friendly living and conservation.

How did you come to develop such a strong relationship with nature?

Firstly, I am a newbie to eco-consciousness and environmental sustainable practices. But originating from Borneo and experiencing the escalating environmental crisis up close and personal, it has become important to me to lead by example and to do my bit, however small. (For instance, the singer has furnished her apartment entirely with recycled and pre-loved furniture.) And in March 2019, I was privileged to adopt Sigat and Mas, two gorgeous male babies from the Semenggoh Orangutan Sanctuary.

Have you had to deal with criticisms and fake news? If yes, how do you handle it?

Everybody is a critic these days! But it is your choice to react or not. I digest the essence of what is said and if it's constructive criticism, I will learn from it. If it isn't, then I'll simply shrug it off as it will not matter tomorrow.

If you could play a gig with and have dinner with anyone from the music industry, who would it be?

Play live with Karen Carpenter. Talk shop and have dinner with Quincy Jones and Clive Davis.

Please share one nugget of information about you that your fans might be unaware of.

I love *Terrace House* (a Japanese reality television show). I'm a huge fan! I subscribed and paid for VPN just so I can watch it on Netflix Japan. I even go on Reddit and discuss the episodes in the forum.

What's next for Zee Avi?

Follow my natural evolution and continue to be of service to music. I also wish to cultivate and advance collaborations with young artistes who need a platform to break through. ●



Daniel Adams' photographs of Zee are part of the *In Between* series, which "explores the feelings, emotions and the aspects of change". Visit www.danieladamsphotography.work for more information.





“The younger generation of Malaysians are so courageous and bold in expressing themselves and they do not defer to other people’s expectations of them. These young artistes inspire me to be unapologetic about my own expressions too.”

Zee wefie-ing with friends and fans at a jamming session in ILHAM Gallery, November 2019

PHOTO: JUN KIT

Live! — Personalities

WAN *of a* KIND

*Bursting with personality,
Chef Wan never fails to provide
food for thought!*

Text **Anita Kandhavel**

Photos **Low Yen Yeing**



It was a sweltering afternoon when we dropped by the eponymous restaurant, De.Wan 1958 by Chef Wan at The LINC KL, which was still buzzing with patrons despite the hour being well past lunchtime. As we cooled down with a refreshing drink, a flurry of activity heralds the arrival of the celebrity chef himself.

B

ouncing onto the scene in his characteristic batik shirt, the culinary icon is all bustle — courting updates from his staff and briskly reciprocating with a slew of instructions as he simultaneously performs a quick reconnaissance of the dining space whilst graciously accommodating “wefie” requests from some of his excited guests.

“They always ask for photos,” says Datuk (Dr) Chef Redzuawan bin Ismail by way of introduction, his hands animatedly moving in their signature waves. Without missing a beat, Chef Wan asks, “*Nak* espresso? Latte? Cappuccino? *Jom* we go into one of the private rooms.”

Undoubtedly the country’s most famous chef, Chef Wan is no enigma. He is an open book and is never too shy to express his views. Blessed with the gift of the gab, the loquacious chef became a household favourite on television screens across the country, thanks to his cooking shows which married his droll wit to delicious recipes which were easy to replicate. Chef Wan holds the honour of being the first local chef to host his very own television show in Malaysia.

Almost three decades later, this gastronomic powerhouse has added author, actor, restaurateur and entrepreneur to his repertoire, and in the process he has reaped international recognition and many prestigious awards. However, it is Chef Wan’s deep-rooted passion for food and his unrelenting effort to present and promote the diversity of Malaysian cuisine on

a global platform that have seen him travelling extensively around the world, piquing the taste buds and teasing the palates of connoisseurs, foodies and laymen alike.

In 2010, Chef Wan was appointed culinary ambassador for Tourism Malaysia — a role that has further fuelled his determination to bring Malaysian favourites to a wider audience — cooking for and rubbing shoulders with foreign royalty and dignitaries, Hollywood stars, and an impressive list of other celebrities.

“Food is a unifying force. Whenever I cook abroad, whichever country it may be, there is always one thing in common — everyone loves our food!” declares the proud Malaysian.

As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the tasting and just a small sampling of Chef Wan’s dishes reinforces his culinary credentials. Brushing aside our admittedly token resistance to being fed, the hospitable chef kept serving us piping hot delicacies during the course of our conversation. A true gastronome, his essential love for quality food is evident as he seamlessly interrupts his own thread of conversation to describe each dish. “*Makan, makan dulu*, eat while it’s hot,” he urges. When we express our approval as we tuck into his bestselling fried spring roll, he cheerfully adds, “It’s got three different types of mushroom in it.”

Details matter a great deal to the meticulous chef. “I was adamant that the restaurant must produce the same quality of food that I serve my guests at my home,” says Chef Wan, who unapologetically admits to firing seven chefs for not measuring up to his exacting standards in the first 56 days following De.Wan’s launch. True to his word, the whole experience evoked memories of being fed by a doting mother and that is precisely what Chef Wan literally and metaphorically brings to the table. Authenticity, emotion, love and an almost parental connection between himself and those he feeds.





Live! What is Malaysia's culinary identity?

Chef Wan: Malaysian cuisine is unique and not easy to define. Our food reflects the history of our country. Different types of food and ingredients were introduced from Sabah, Sarawak and our neighbouring countries, through merchants and immigrants or through colonisation and marriage — various elements played a part in shaping our cuisine. Of course we have some ethnic Malay dishes but Malaysian food has largely been influenced by many different regions and our cuisine is a melting pot of all these cultures. Others have become a part of us and we have become a part of others. Food travels and evolves, so how then can we claim that this or that dish belongs 100% to Malaysia? And what purpose does it serve as you can't prove your claim? Rather than arguing about ownership, we should just ac-

cept that our multi-cultural diversity is part of our culinary fabric and instead, celebrate that this diversity has blessed us with such rich variety in our food. After all, Malaysia, truly Asia, right?

How has food culture in Malaysia evolved?

Malaysians are now more exposed. We have more youngsters who have studied overseas and want to eat the food they tasted abroad. Affordable air tickets have provided Malaysians with the opportunity to travel and taste different foods. There are so many cooking shows on TV nowadays featuring a variety of cuisines, and with the large number of expats in the country, there has been a corresponding demand for new types of food. Furthermore, there is also a growing movement in the country for sustainable food and healthy eating practices.

Pantry Essentials

Chef Wan's top 10 must-have herbs and spices



1. Paprika
2. Cumin
3. Vietnamese mint
4. Lemongrass
5. Galangal
6. Chillies
7. Coriander powder
8. Whole white pepper
9. Basil
10. Italian parsley

Cucur udang

(Prawn fritters)

One of Chef Wan's top picks

Serves 12

Batter ingredients

1 kg plain white flour
5 g baking powder
30 g corn flour
65 g rice flour
10 g salt

Filling ingredients

25 g *kuchai* (chives),
cut into 1 inch strips
25 g peeled *taugeh*
(bean sprouts)
25 g red chillies,
thinly sliced
120 g (about 50 pieces)
prawns, roughly diced
25 g red onions,
finely diced

Method

1. Mix all the batter ingredients in a large bowl. Then add water in small amounts and gently combine until the texture of the batter is smooth and is the consistency of pancake batter.
2. Next, add in all the filling ingredients into the batter and gently combine.
3. Heat a deep pan with cooking oil until the oil is heated properly.
4. Scoop generous spoonfuls of the batter and drop into the oil and fry until golden brown.
5. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain excess oil.
6. Serve hot as is or serve with either sweet chilli sauce or peanut sauce.



Do you have a preference for certain cuisines?

Yes, although I try to keep an open mind as I'm always eager to taste and learn new things. For Asian food, I love Thai and Japanese cuisine and Italian when it comes to Western. I love Northern and Southern Indian food too but I can't indulge in it much as it's simply too rich for me now as I have gastritis.

Tell us about your latest initiative — De.Wan 1958.

Ironically, despite my achievements in this industry, I've never really had the confidence or the push to start my own restaurant. But I was frequently asked, "Why don't you start your own restaurant? You can then share your recipes." But then the market is flooded with my cookbooks anyway, all of which have been bestsellers, so I thought, "Do I really need to open a restaurant?" However, I believe it is important to pass down my knowledge in a different way and so De.Wan was born. (More than just a restaurant, De.Wan is a state-of-the-art venue that spans 13,000 sq ft to cater for any type of celebratory event.) The menu offers the best of heritage Malaysian fare that I love to cook and eat, sourced from all the states in Malaysia which I feel will most appeal to the general palate. We also rotate our menu every three months to keep it fresh and I'm very pleased and thankful to say that since we opened in April 2019, each day we have enjoyed a full house for both lunch and dinner sittings. Challenging or not, I am very particular that De.Wan provides consistent quality food and services. Therefore, each dish served must meet my standards of taste and quality. For example, we cook our food with fresh ingredients including using freshly squeezed coconut milk or making our own *bawang goreng* and *kerisik*. I was taught by my grandmother that good food comes from using quality ingredients cooked with love and passion. "*Kalau malas, tak usah buat. Jangan kerja separuh-separuh jalan macam ni,*" she would say.

“Rather than arguing about ownership, we should just accept that our multicultural diversity is part of our culinary fabric and instead, celebrate that this diversity has blessed us with such rich variety in our food.”



Bubur Som Som

(Som Som pudding)

A traditional Malay dessert that originated from the state of Kelantan, commonly known as Lompat Tikam in Kelantan and Terengganu

Serves 10

Ingredients

40 g rice flour
25 g corn flour
10 pandan leaves
150 ml water
1 kg coconut milk
5 g salt
10 g sugar

Method

1. Cut up the pandan leaves into one inch strips and liquidise with the water in a blender.
2. Strain the blended pandan water and keep the juice aside.
3. In a large bowl, combine the rice and corn flour.
4. Add in the coconut milk and mix the batter well.
5. Then add in the pandan juice and combine together.
6. Strain the batter mixture into a large saucepan to ensure there is no lumps.
7. Add the salt and sugar in.
8. Cook over low heat, continuously stirring the mixture until it thickens into a pudding-like consistency with a glossy sheen.
9. Remove from the fire and allow it to slightly cool. Then pour the mixture into moulds and chill in the refrigerator.
10. Serve with palm sugar syrup and a small dollop of coconut milk.





How do you balance between creating tasty and healthy food?

It's not only about eating healthy food but about living a balanced lifestyle. We have the choice; so we can choose to eat in moderation, exercise and if you happen to indulge in a rich meal, then you make up for it with something light and healthy at your next meal. But I will not compromise on the taste of my dishes. If the recipe calls for more ghee or coconut milk, then I will definitely add it in.

Given your hectic schedule, how do you de-stress?

Pottering around in my garden. I have a beautiful vegetable garden in my house and I now harvest some of the herbs and greens to use in the restaurant.

Your candour has embroiled you in occasional controversies. How do you deal with criticism or fake news?

Let's face it, I'm not known for my

diplomacy. But I firmly believe that as long as I speak the truth and do my best, then my conscience is clear. And therefore, I will not pay attention to the negative views and opinions voiced.

With a life lived so boldly, do you have any regrets?

For now, I occasionally regret opening this restaurant as running it has been exhausting, but to be honest, the feeling is only momentary.

What's next on the horizon?

I'm planning to open a cooking school in Langkawi which focuses on Southeast Asian cuisine. I feel that Langkawi is an ideal location for several reasons — ample space to have accompanying orchards, vegetable gardens and even a small farm. It will also be easy to source fresh produce like seafood, and lastly, there are plenty of hotels in Langkawi for the students to then apprentice at. ●



Live! — Personalities

N

*Unveiling the face
behind the strings*

D

Text **Anita Kandhavel**

Photos **Low Yen Yeing & Hamish Irvine**

Above and beyond her formidable achievements, the most successful female squash player of all time is also approachable and down to earth, demonstrating why she is one of Malaysia's most beloved personalities.

Two things strike me within seconds of meeting Datuk (Dr) Nicol Ann David. The first is that she is more petite in the flesh than she appears on TV, and the other is that she is so genuinely nice!

It's no wonder then that throughout her career, Nicol has been praised by her predecessors, commentators and fellow competitors as not only a player of uncompromising skill, steely determination and exemplary sporting conduct, but also for her pleasant, humble and friendly demeanour off the court. As we adjust tables and chairs ahead of our photoshoot with Malaysia's sporting legend, it is almost disorienting to see her chipping in to help us move the furniture! There are simply no airs and graces with Nicol.

Nicol's love affair with squash began when she was just five years old. Her two older sisters were taking lessons at Penang's first public sports centre and the preschooler was given a racquet by their coach, partly so that she could play along, but mainly as a distraction to prevent her from getting underfoot.

"I loved it, I loved playing with my sisters. They were actually the talented ones and set the standard but I was just determined to beat them," reminisces the champ with a cheeky grin which belies a competitive streak that separates the best from the rest.

She won her first Women's World Junior Squash Championships in 1999 at the age of 15, earning her the distinction of being the youngest woman to become the world junior champion. At 18, Nicol uprooted herself from the comfort and familiarity of home and relocated to Amsterdam to begin her journey on the professional circuit. What followed was an incredible career adorned with victories, trophies and records on an unprecedented scale in the women's game! Despite following in the footsteps of dominant players such as five-time world champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald, Nicol left no room for doubt that she was the greatest woman ever to have graced a squash court. Having eventually called time on a career that was embellished with an astonishing haul of eight Women's World Squash Championship titles, it came as no surprise when in 2018 Nicol was voted by squash fans around the world as the G.O.A.T. (Greatest of All Time).

"It simply comes down to strict discipline and continuous training. I know it's a cliché but there are no shortcuts! When I was about 12 years old, I used to watch the great squash players and dreamt of being like them one day but it took hard work and years to get there. Winning my first World Junior title was a defining moment. I knew then that I could take this career further and with my parents' encouragement, chased that goal," says Nicol.







To begin with, she conscripted Amsterdam-based Liz Irving (former world No. 2 and Australian champion) as her coach. “Liz and I worked very well together and more importantly, we enjoyed each other’s company. I knew that I needed much more to make the transition from a junior player to a professional player and believed Liz could help me achieve that. She trained me to not just better my game but more importantly, to maintain it. Liz stripped down my game technically, tactically and changed my movements, right down to having to re-learn how to hold the racquet correctly or to stand a certain way. I trusted her training process and diligently stuck to her training programme, reinventing myself, adjusting my goals and refining my strengths,” she adds.

“But I have been so fortunate in the support that I have received throughout my career, starting with my incredible family. My parents used to drive us across the country for matches, supporting us financially and cheering us on at all the tournaments. We were a unit and my sisters and parents, while very protective of me, ardently nurtured my interest,” reveals the squash queen who officially hung up her racquet in June 2019 after more than 20 years in the game.

“The National Sports Institute and National Sports Council too were generous with their support and expertise from early on and that’s why the government’s increased and continuous investment in sports is so important. Their contribution is vital in building up athletes at every stage from the time they first pick up the sport, right up to competition level. Their role in identifying and nurturing more world-class athletes is so crucial to the development of sports in Malaysia,” asserts Nicol.

One of the things that Nicol has every reason to be proud of is that over a career spanning two decades, she has earned the highest respect from her peers. In an era when missteps by public personalities are all too common, Nicol has been universally and unconditionally acclaimed for her impeccable temperament, sportsmanship and overall contribution to the game. In 2015, before she played and lost to Nour El Sherbini (the eventual champion

that year) in the quarter finals of the World Championships at Bukit Jalil, Nour’s coach, the legendary Egyptian four-time Men’s World Champion, Amr Shabana, said this, “If Nicol were playing against anyone other than Nour today, I would be rooting for her to win. She is an amazing person and a great ambassador for our sport and her country.”

Post-retirement, Nicol has moved back to Malaysia after living in Amsterdam for the past 16 years and is already knee-deep in shaping a new career through an opinion column, speaking engagements and motivational talks. Furthermore, her deep passion for squash and her commitment to give back to the sport have seen her establish the Nicol David Foundation.

“Sports play such a key role in character development. I want to encourage people to play any type of sports and to understand that with dedication, it is possible to enjoy a successful sporting career. However, my

“My main objective is to empower girls and help them to realise their full potential through squash.”

main objective is to empower girls and help them to realise their full potential through squash. We also plan to teach English to our trainees as I believe that a good command of English is an invaluable tool.

“In the meantime, I plan to enjoy my retirement and indulge in all the things I enjoy such as music, dancing and sketching. But mostly, I want to travel as much as I can without my squash racquet because despite having travelled far and wide, I never saw anything beyond airports, hotels and squash courts! So now, I’m really looking forward to sightseeing and soaking up all the usual tourist fare when I travel,” she concludes.

Whenever Nicol was interviewed after having won yet another match or tournament, her profound devotion to the country of her birth was palpable. As Malaysians, it would always warm the cockles of our hearts listening to Nicol professing her love for our country on an international platform. Having flown the country’s flag proudly for so many years, surely nobody will begrudge Malaysia’s squash queen some long overdue and well-earned downtime. Yet the feeling remains that there is still so much more to come from Nicol as she transitions into the next phase of her life, and we can be sure, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that she will offer Malaysia even more of herself in the years to come.

Nicol David

on the double dot

Live!: What was your training regime like?

Nicol: We adopted a very scientific approach that combined tailored gym sessions, track sessions and mental training. I trained twice daily, six days a week. With squash, there's no specific body type but to be a good player, you need to be agile, fit, fast, skilful and mentally strong. It's hard to describe the physical demands of playing squash at the highest level but suffice it to say that it's impossible to succeed without a rigorous and well-planned training regime.

Did you have to adhere to a tailored dietary programme when training?

Yes, a very strict diet called "feed me food" diet! I like any kind of food, but *char kuey teow* and mum's cooking top the list. Squash is very demanding on the body. You burn off a lot of energy and since I also have a high metabolic rate, I needed to replenish constantly. Of course while training or competing, my body needed the right type of fuel and so my dietary intake was tailored to my requirements for a particular day such as more carbs or more protein. But I had to eat every three hours or so when I was playing as I needed to refuel. Having retired now, though, I may just need to exercise a touch more restraint!

Did you have any superstitions before each game?

Not superstitions per se but I had a very specific routine that I followed before each match. For instance, I was fastidious in the way I packed my bag and would arrange the water bottles and other items in my bag in exactly the same way for every match to the point that my friends used to tease me about it! I also had a precise set of warm-up routines that I followed prior to every match.

When you won your eighth and last World Championship, you were 2-1 and 10-6 down facing four championship points in the fourth set against Egyptian No. 1, Raneem El Welily, in Cairo in front of a partisan home crowd. Many say this was your finest hour as a squash player. How on earth did you turn that match around?

I honestly can't recall as I was so focused in the moment. All I remember is that she was about to serve at match ball and the crowd was cheering her on loudly. I just told myself that I wasn't going to go down without a fight and I literally fought tooth and nail on every rally and every point like my life depended on it. That was my only focus. I somehow won that crucial fourth game. I came into the fifth and deciding game with the same mindset and somehow prevailed to seal the title. Ironically, I can't recall anything else about that match and till today, I have to watch it again to jog my memory.



PHOTO: HAMISH IRVINE

Who was your toughest opponent?

I've faced many tough opponents but towards the end, it was the Egyptian players Raneem El Welily and Nour El Sherbini who proved to be my toughest adversaries.

As much as all athletes know that it's inevitable, was it difficult to make the momentous decision to retire professionally?

Initially, yes. When I lost the number one ranking, I struggled to come to terms with it. (Nicol reigned as the world No. 1 for a record-breaking 108 consecutive months before that.) Then as time went on, I understood that the hunger within me was not as fierce as it used to be. It's not easy to maintain that level of intensity over a prolonged period. It is only when I realised that my drive had waned, that I could properly appreciate everything that I had achieved in the game before making the decision to finally step down. If you no longer have that fire burning strongly within you, then it's time to try something else, though it was still tough to make the decision as I imagined that this was the only thing that I could do well. But once the decision was made, I was determined to enjoy the remainder of my time on tour and to simply have fun.

How frustrating is it for you that squash is not recognised as an Olympic sport, especially given some of the other "sports" which have been included on the Olympic roster?

We have vigorously campaigned for squash to be represented as an Olympic sport but despite our best efforts, it was clear that the International Olympic Committee had a different priority and squash doesn't meet their criteria for now. So rather than focusing on squash being excluded, we should instead focus our energies on building up the sport. Hopefully one day, squash makes the cut. I would love to see a squash player from any nation standing on the podium at the Olympic Games and would take comfort in the knowledge that I contributed in some small way towards that happening.

Excluding family members, who are your biggest heroes on and off the squash court?

In squash, it would be my coach Liz Irving, who is both a mentor and an inspiration, and Jahangir Khan, who to me was the ultimate squash player. He built up the sport to where it is today, earning squash the recognition it deserves. Off the squash courts, I have great admiration for Michael Johnson (retired American sprinter) and Roger Federer. ●

“I would love to see a squash player from any nation standing on the podium at the Olympic Games and would take comfort in the knowledge that I contributed in some small way towards that happening.”



PHOTO: HAMISH IRVINE



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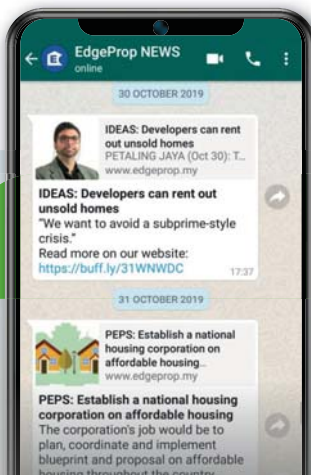
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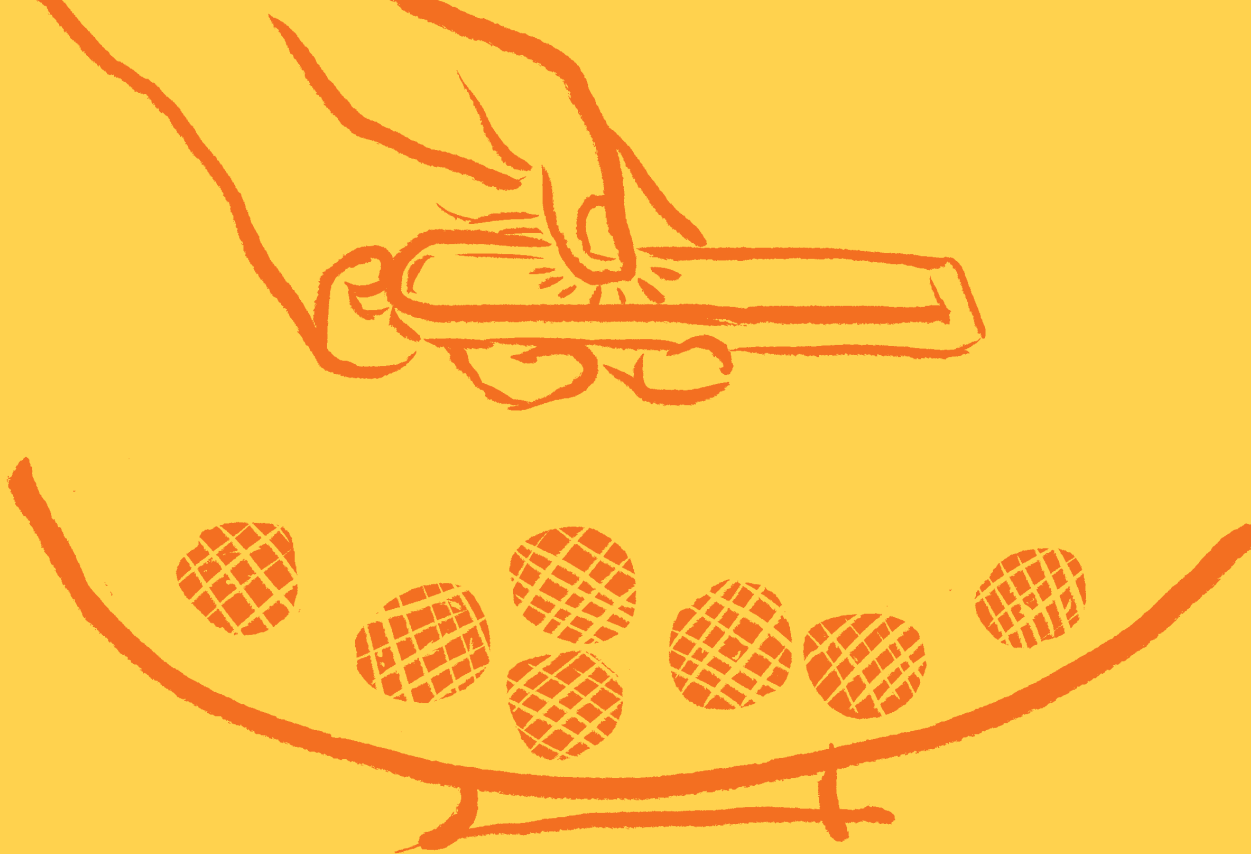


2 Send us a WhatsApp with "NEWS" and your full name in the message.

Excuse me, **FEED THE PHONE FIRST!**

Whilst food quality is the overriding priority for most diners, aesthetics too play an important role especially for those who need to feed their “grams”. So prime your cameras and create a drool-worthy post with our pick of some of the choicest hangouts that serve up their fare in the best possible light to accommodate those who insta before they ingest.

Text **Chin Wai Lun**



URBAN GREEN CABIN started out from the idea of having an eco-friendly hangout in the heart of George Town, Penang in Lebuh Victoria.

The aim of the cafe “is to make city folk more ecologically aware and to make the city a better place”.

The interior is sleek and minimalist except for the plants — lush and abundant. Taking the nature theme to a different level, the most notable feature of Urban Green Cabin would be the moss garden next to the bar counter, followed by a stream of maiden-hair ferns covering the entire bar and counter front.

At the centre of the cafe is a vertical garden under a glass-roofed patio that provides plenty of natural light. The cafe is also adorned with large staghorn ferns in various nooks.

All these, the cafe insists, are not hard to maintain as long as the plants are suited for the indoors and are provided ample sunlight. For more gardening tips, just check with the friendly crew. Urban Green Cabin also conducts the occasional terrarium-making workshops.

The cafe serves both local and Western delights. Favourites from the menu include Original Fish & Chips, Salmon Eggs Benedict and Mum’s Nasi Lemak. To promote sustainability, the cafe plans to start planting herbs around the premises for its own use from 2020. ●

Urban Green Cabin
156, Lebuh Victoria, 10300
George Town, Penang
Opening hours:
Mon to Sun, 8am to 10pm
IG: @urbangreencabin

URBAN GREEN CABIN

Moss here, ferns there, garden everywhere



PHOTOS: URBAN GREEN CABIN

Above: The El Loco Big Breakfast platter is one of the menu items in the cafe that offers both local and Western delights

Left: The most eye-catching element of the cafe has to be its signature moss garden and the various ferns adorning the walls and countertops

TRANSPARENT COFFEE

Giving credit to its source

YOU MIGHT MISS this little gem if you didn't pay a little extra attention while passing by Jalan Abdullah off Jalan Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur.

Its retro-styled front porch features pots of ferns and other plants that effortlessly hang from the ceiling.

Venture inside and one can find a pebble-laden seating area and bare walls before entering the main portion of the cafe — a tunnel marked by a distinctive circular archway which leads to a contemporary-styled chic lounge sporting earth-toned colours for a relaxed setting. At night, this area serves as the premises for Coley Cocktail Bar (in a business collaboration with Transparent Coffee).

Below: Ng demonstrates how he brews a cup of the specialty coffee

Below right: Its specialty freshly baked sourdough toast served with French butter and muscovado sugar, chicken and aubergine sandwich with a cup of freshly brewed coffee



Transparent Coffee's owners — Joey Mah, Keith Koay and Ng Jia Le are no strangers to the coffee industry as they also own One Half, a specialty coffee chain located in Puchong and Damansara Uptown in Selangor. In addition, both Mah and Koay have earned bragging rights as past champions of the Malaysian Barista Championships.

“At Transparent Coffee, we primarily focus on direct-sourced coffee beans, meaning that we purchase the green beans directly from the farmers themselves.

“We want to give credit back to the farmers hence our name Transparent Coffee — transparent source, transparent progress, local trade and local products,” Ng explains.

“We spoke to the owners of the space and suggested the idea of sharing the premises, just as they were doing previously. About 90% of the landscape and design is by Coley except for an additional brew bar located outside the cafe and an espresso bar in the bar area. We didn't intentionally aspire towards a green-themed cafe. All this work is credited back to one of the owners of Coley, CK Kho who is a plant lover,” says Ng.

Come 5pm, the coffee bar transforms into a totally different atmosphere when the cocktail bar takes over. — *Natalie Khoo* ●

Transparent Coffee
Opening hours: Daily 8am to 5pm
(last order at 4.15pm)
6-G, Jalan Abdullah,
Bangsar, 59000 Kuala Lumpur
IG: @transparent_bangsar

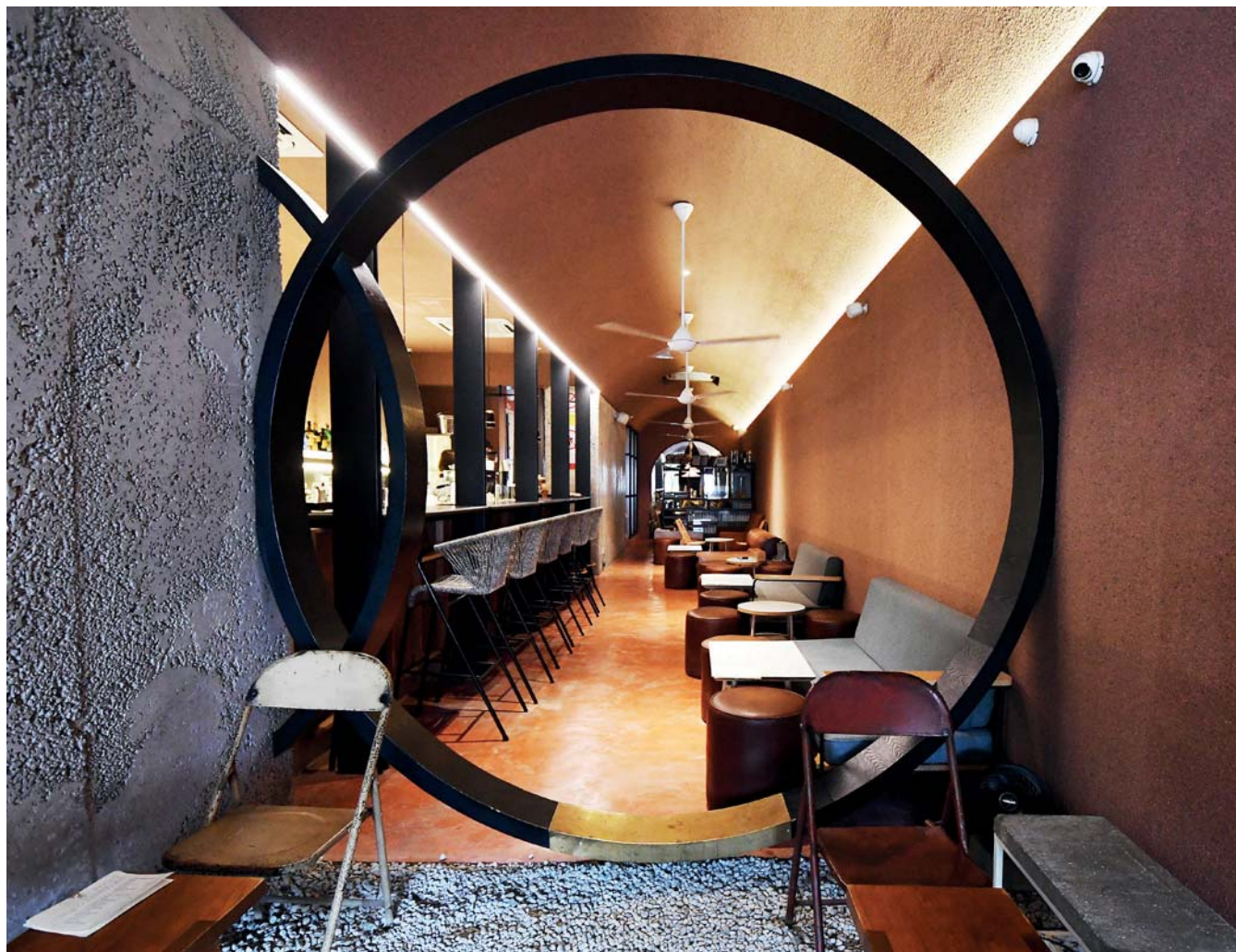


**Picture perfect
cafes and bars**



Left: The verdant front entrance to Transparent Coffee

Below: The distinctive circular archway leads to a chic lounge



PHOTOS: LOW YEN YEING

POKOK KL

Dining with nature in a glasshouse

A GEM OF A hideaway from the hustle and bustle of the city, Brick House's flagship cafe, Pokok KL is nestled amidst abundant lush greenery, tucked well away from the ever-busy Federal Highway. The glasshouse-themed cafe is located within MAHSA Avenue's compound in Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

The thoughtfully designed glasshouse creates a unique dining experience for patrons by bringing in the calming outdoors into a cosy interior — aided by ample sunlight through the glass roof for that natural insta-worthy lighting, and large windows framing the trees around it for a scenic backdrop.

Raw brick walls lend an industrial and minimalist charm to the interiors as well. If the weather permits, one can also take the alfresco dining option for a more laid-back experience and be even closer to nature.

Pokok KL was founded by Datuk Sharon Haniffa and Datin Christine Bong and began operations in October 2018. Besides the aesthetics, patrons can look forward to appetising dishes with fusion flavours that are carefully curated to suit the local palate.

Signature dishes include the Chilli Padi Pesto Pasta, Aunty Aileen's Nyonya Laksa and the Smoked Salmon Benedict. An array of freshly baked cakes are also available daily.

Another notable feature would be its signature Pink Latte that consists of a unique combination of beetroot, cinnamon and honey.

The picturesque glasshouse cafe also doubles up as an event space for festive dinners and parties. ●

Pokok KL
MAHSA Avenue, Block B,
Jalan Ilmu, off Jalan Universiti,
59100 Kuala Lumpur
Opening hours: 9am to 9pm
daily except Tuesdays
9am to 8pm
IG: @pokok.kl



PHOTOS: POKOK KL



Top left: Cakes featuring a local twist of sirap bandung and apam balik

Top right: The glasshouse provides ample sunlight during the day for those “Instagenic” moments

Left: Raw brick walls lend an industrial and minimalist charm to the interiors

Right (clockwise from top): Nasi Lemak Bomb, Smoked Salmon Benedict and Chilli Padi Pesto Pasta are the recommended and signature dishes here



BEAN BROTHERS

Taking a cue from its green surrounds

“WELCOME, MY BROTHER from another mother” — those are the words and the tagline of Bean Brothers cafe that welcome patrons when they step into the premises.

Almost feeling like we were entering a forest, the company which manages Bean Brothers, Able Coffee Group managing partner Keith Chua says that there was no specific decor or interior design that was set intentionally for their cafes. Instead, what they try to do is to bring out the character or personality of the building and its neighbourhood.

The cafe is located at The LINC, a relatively new mall at the intersection of Jalan Ampang and Jalan Tun Razak in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. And since the mall focuses on environment preservation including saving a number of trees at the site of the mall, Bean Brothers incorporated that into the interior design of the cafe. Besides, the conservation jives with the founders’ affinity for plants and greenery.

For instance, the outdoor seating features one of the many mature trees at the mall with the seats arranged around the tree.

“We have added some of our personal favourite plants like the *monstera adansonii* (Swiss cheese plant) which we have positioned around our tables,” Chua shares, adding that the brick flooring and hanging track lights around the cafe complement the plants well by providing a warm hue and adding a rustic feel overall.

The signature items here are their blended and single origin specialty coffee. Chua also recommends his three top picks for a meal here — the Eggs and Greens, Mutton Curry Pasta and Chicken Confit. — *Natalie Khoo* ●

Bean Brothers MY (The LINC KL)
G-1, The LINC KL,
No. 360, Jalan Tun Razak,
Taman U Thant, 50400 Kuala Lumpur
Opens daily from 8.30am to 10pm
(Kitchen opens until 5pm)
IG: @beanbrothers.my



Left (from right clockwise): Their signature dishes — Chicken Confit, Mutton Curry Pasta, Eggs and Green which can be served as a salad or in a wrap and a cup of freshly brewed flat white

Far left: The cafe which opened in November 2018, occupies two levels at The LINC KL

Picture perfect
cafes and bars



PHOTOS: LOW YEN YEING

Above: The cafe also has an abundance of natural light, making it an ideal “insta-spot”

Left: “We chose plants that are easily maintained and adapt well indoors,” says Chua

2D SUNWAY NEXIS

A tour of 2D Europe

THE 2D CAFE LOCATED at Sunway Nexis, Kota Damansara, Selangor offers an unusual ambience that will be a treat for your senses. The entire cafe looks like a giant sketch of 2D drawings bring-ing you into an alternate reality upon entering its premises similar to that of a comic book.

And they haven't missed a spot. Everything has been painstakingly hand drawn or painted including the furniture, doors and windows, right down to the outline of the plastic bottles of its beverage offerings. Perhaps the only items that are of colour in this black and white cafe are the handcrafted beverages (bubble tea, fruit soda mixes and more).

The theme of traditional Europe at 2D Sunway Nexis was chosen by its franchisee, Phoebe Lim, and features well-known icons of Europe.

A stroll inside will take you across the continent with sketches of Big Ben, the London Eye, streets of the Jordaan district in Amsterdam, a Roman Bath and more.

Lim explains that travel trips to Europe are on many people's bucket lists, hence she decided to capture the essence of the continent at the cafe through its 2D-interior design concept.

The result — an amazingly Instagram-able concept. "Enjoy your 'trip' and take as many pictures as you want," Lim adds.

One can also check out 2D's other two outlets in Sunway Geo and ss15 Subang. Both have their own distinctive themes — Japanese-European hybrid and Egyptian respectively. ●

2D Sunway Nexis
A-GF-02 Sunway Nexis 1,
Jalan PJU 5/1,
Kota Damansara,
47810 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Opening hours:
Mon to Sun, 12pm to 10.30pm
IG: @2d.cafe



The colourful beverage offerings of the cafe, crafted by trained mixologists



Above: Lim chose a European theme as a trip to Europe would be on many people's bucket lists

Left: It's like stepping into the pages of a comic book the moment you enter the doors of this cafe

PHOTOS: LOW YEN VEING



“Think of the cafe as a scrap book,” says Neoh

NARROW MARROW

Palm wine or toddy infusions are a hot favourite

Trinkets, odds and ends, all sorts of things...



PHOTOS: NARROW MARROW

ALVIN NEOH AND JAMIE OON set up Narrow Marrow in 2013 as a space to collect what they describe as curious and interesting objects left discarded throughout George Town, Penang. Yes, the rather senescent shoplot on Lebuah Carnavon that the cafe occupies is filled with all sorts of curios and whatnots.

The tables and chairs are one of a kind, in varied materials — wood, steel and even old (but pristine) car seats.

As Neoh says, Narrow Marrow is “an artsy cafe without the pretences”, which also hosts a number of artworks by local artists who are well-known within the George Town community. The un-plastered walls double as a canvas to showcase their masterpieces.

Meanwhile, the area upstairs serves as an event or exhibition space.

According to Neoh, the cafe is constantly changing due to new artwork and new “old furniture and curios” being added or swapped from time to time.

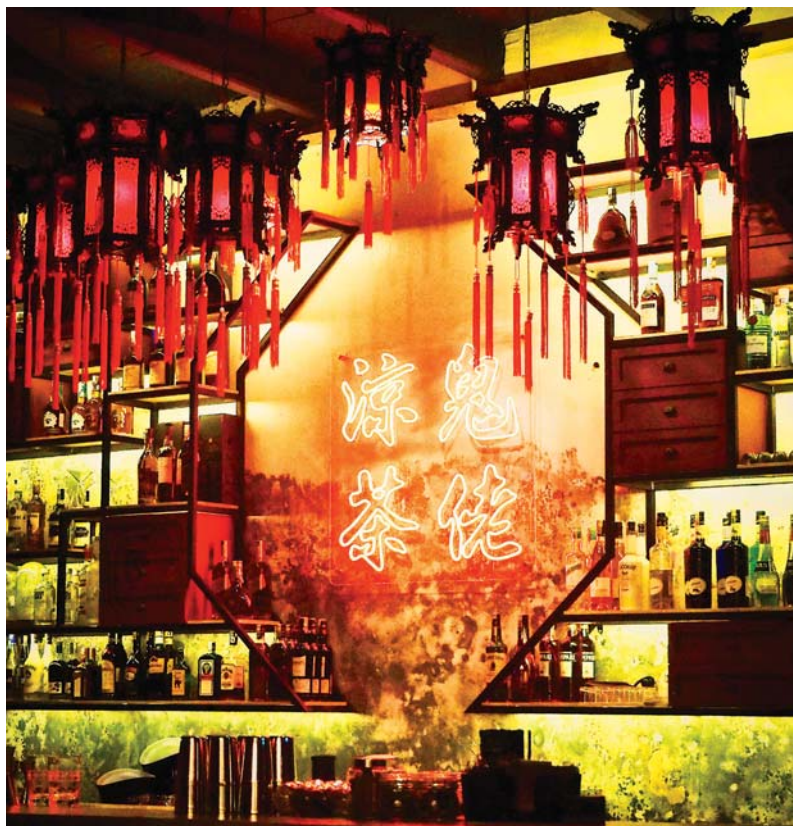
“You can think of Narrow Marrow as a scrap book. It is not entirely about the decor concept, food or drinks. It is about the experience, especially one that varies from one person to another — a literal living room,” declares Neoh. ●

Narrow Marrow
252A, Lebuah Carnarvon,
10100 George Town, Penang
Opening hours: Mon to Sun,
10am to 1am, except Wed
IG: @narrowmarrow



No set theme here as items are always swapped out for “new” pre-loved ones

Picture perfect
cafes and bars



PHOTOS: THE OLD MERCHANT

Top left: The columns at the entrance bear the sign of a former private remittance service provider

Left: The octagonal retro neon sign bearing a wry phrase that references beer. '鬼佬涼茶' (*guǐ lǎo liáng chá*) illuminates the bar area



Chinese oil-paper umbrellas adorn the ceilings of this bar providing a touch of vintage elegance

THE OLD MERCHANT

Melaka's first speakeasy bar

THE OLD MERCHANT is a hidden cocktail bar located in a pre-war shop at Jalan Kampung Pantai at the west bank of Melaka River, the site of Melaka City's original Chinatown dating back to the 17th century.

It occupies the spot of a former private bank/merchant established in the 1920s. The white columns still bear the sign of the bank's name in red Chinese characters (Poh Teck & Co). These private banks were known as *piaohao* (票号) and were generally set up to help Chinese immigrants to transfer money back to their hometowns in China, way before the inception of a proper banking system.

The interior features oriental elements at every corner from the round Chinese arched gateway and red lanterns, to the lion-head door knockers. The ceiling is decked with an impressive array of Chinese oil-paper old umbrellas and "cherry blossoms", providing it with a touch of vintage elegance. Complementing the decor is a wall painting of Chrysanthemum flowers spanning the entire lounge while more lanterns adorn the bar area which is illuminated by prominent retro neon signage.

At this speakeasy bar, their signature cocktails are mostly inspired by the rich history of Melaka. One example is the Chasing Sang Kancil that is an obvious ode to the iconic mousedeer that played a part in the founding of the historical city. The concoction is served in a small margarita glass with two red chillies cheekily placed on the rim to resemble a pair of devil's horns. ●



Love in Malacca (left) and Chasing Sang Kancil are among the signature concoctions made as odes to the rich history of Melaka

The Old Merchant
 88, Jalan Kampung Pantai,
 75200 Melaka
 Opening hours:
 Tue to Sun from 6pm to 1am,
 Fri to Sat from 6pm to 2am,
 closed on Mondays
 IG: @the_old_merchant

THIS COCKTAIL BAR is hidden among the pre-war shophouses in Ipoh's Old Town along Jalan Sultan Yussuf. Inhabiting the least expected of places not too far off from the Birch Memorial Clock Tower, She Said | Hidden Lounge sits above a similarly hidden hotpot restaurant, Red Inn Hotpot (under the same management).

Elements of ancient China form the basis of this bar's decor and interior. Old Chinese memorabilia (with inspiration from Imperial China) are found scattered

throughout the lounge. Notably, a hanging emperor's costume greets visitors as they make their way up the stairs. According to mixologist and co-founder Desmond Beh, She Said | Hidden Lounge aims to evoke nostalgic memories of Old Shanghai.

Both the hotpot restaurant and the lounge are decorated in a shabby chic style of pre-war Ipoh. "We intentionally kept the walls exposed and un-plastered. Plus, we filled up the place with old oriental furniture," he explains.

SHE SAID

Behold the emperor!

Ancient Imperial China is the theme of this hidden bar



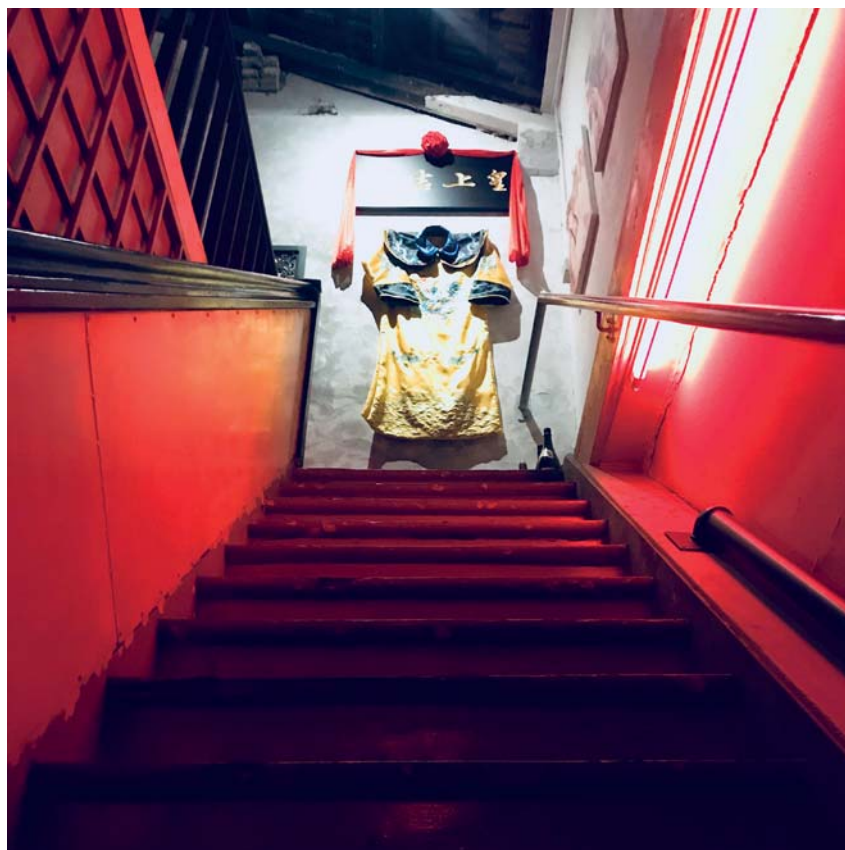
PHOTOS: SHE SAID | HIDDEN LOUNGE

Finding the place is an adventure in itself as there are no signboards, just two red lanterns hanging at the entrance of the corner shop unit. Patrons must find the “courage” to enter and resist the temptation of the savoury hotpot dishes and pass a brief “interrogation” to access the bar upstairs.

The cocktails prove quite a feast for the eyes as well. Their signature concoction, 皇上吉祥 (*huáng shàng jí xiáng*) features a classic favourite to soothe an irritated throat — *pei pa koa* herbal syrup paired with bourbon, triple sec and plum orange peel served in a ceramic Chinese wine pot teamed with dainty wine cups with rims dipped in sour plum powder.

后宫佳丽 (*hòu gōng jiā lì*), meanwhile, creatively blends *tau fu fah* (soya bean curd) with gin, vanilla syrup and elderflower liquor. This concoction is served in a Chinese tea mug. ●

She Said | Hidden Lounge
124, Jalan Sultan Yussof,
30000 Ipoh, Perak
Opening hours: Tue to Sun
from 7pm to 3am,
closed on Mondays
IG: @shesaid_hiddenlounge



Top: A Chinese emperor's costume greets patrons making their way up to the bar

Left: She Said's signature brews: The *pei pa koa* inspired (Far left) 皇上吉祥 (*huáng shàng jí xiáng*) and *tau fu fah*-based 后宫佳丽 (*hòu gōng jiā lì*)

Picture perfect
cafes and bars



Above: Skybar or cavebar? The luxurious leather and wood whiskey lounge on the lower deck is nestled in a cave high above the ground

Left: The Skybar's signature cocktail, Dr Fish and a serving of prawn lollipops

Facing page: The bar offers an unobstructed view of the million-year-old limestone hills and the geothermal hotspring lakes



SKYBAR @ THE BANJARAN HOTSPRINGS RETREAT

A sky bar, in a cave

THE SKYBAR at The Banjaran Hotspings Retreat in Sunway City Ipoh offers a uniquely luxurious experience in the most unlikely of places. The bar's most distinctive feature must surely be its locale — partially ensconced in a 260-million-year-old limestone hill with an extended terrace perched high above the ground.

While slowly making your way up to the bar on some timber stairs, whiskey connoisseurs will appreciate the lower deck of the establishment tucked inside a small cave. Warm wood-and-leather seats and an amber-lit cabinet displaying some of the world's luxury whiskey offerings provide a rich and elegant ambience.

The upper deck grants patrons an unprecedented and breathtaking view of the limestone hills and a lake. At dusk, the terrace offers a splendid vista of the evening sun

slowly setting into the valley, while at night one can see moonlight reflecting off the geothermal hotspring lake. Interestingly, telescopes are provided for star-gazing on the deck.

The SkyBar features a wide range of spirits and liquor alongside its signature blue-coloured Dr Fish cocktail made with Blue Curaçao, tequila and rum. There is no shortage of dining options either, with a large selection of appetisers and main courses from oysters and prawn lollipops, to the extravagant A5 Japanese wagyu and Kaviari's Beluga Imperial caviar. ●

SkyBar @ The Banjaran Hotspings Retreat

1, Persiaran Lagun Sunway 3,

31150 Ipoh, Perak

Opening hours: Daily 5.30pm to 12.00 midnight

www.thebanjaran.com/cuisine/skybar



PHOTOS: THE BANJARAN HOTSPRINGS RETREAT



PHOTOS: LOW YEN YEING

Left: (from left) Leong, Carmen and David

Above: Some of the handmade leather items by Carmen

Right: Handcrafting can be therapeutic and brings joy



Spark joy with DIY crafts

Text **Tan Ai Leng**

WE ARE NOT short of things but sometimes, we just crave things that bring us pleasure. Instead of scratching your head for gift ideas, why not learn some new skills and make your gifts more meaningful by crafting them yourself?

Yes, it involves more time and effort but handmade gifts make it more personal and valuable to the recipient.

Here to help you do it yourself is a little handicraft shop cum workshop in the bustling SS2 commercial centre in Petaling Jaya, along the same row as popular hangouts and eateries such as Uncle Don's, Go Thai and Chatto tea bar.

Yee Button is more than a shop selling craft tools and materials — it is also where one can bring to life the patterns and colours in our imagination and help stressed-out urbanites relax and have a little fun doing something beyond our normal jobs.

The shop started off selling sewing supplies like needles and thread, buttons, fabrics and pattern books for tailors, but soon expanded to serve other handicraft hobbyists.

Yee Button is founded and managed

by David Yee and wife Sabrina Leong while eldest daughter Carmen is a talented leather crafter who conducts leather craft workshops at Yee Button.

“There is a rising number of people who appreciate handmade items because they find DIY handicrafts make for one-of-a-kind meaningful gifts because the maker is thinking of the loved one during the crafting process,” says Carmen.

“Generally handmade things are more durable than off-the-shelf products too,” she adds.

Both men and women join in the varied handicraft classes held regularly at the shop. Men are especially drawn to making leather items such as name card cases, passport holders, wallets or purses while the more skillful ones make larger items such as bags with various compartments.

Besides gifting and own-use, some just find handcrafting therapeutic and an effective way to release stress.

“Embroidery and leather items require patience as the work needs to be completed using stitches, and after a while, the stitching process helps to calm their minds. The sense of achievement at

the end of it also brings joy and satisfaction — this is an invaluable experience,” offers Carmen.

For David, running such a niche business has been rewarding and is never boring.

“A hobby hype won't last long as people's interest change every few years, like the smocked clothing fad in 2003 and the DIY cloth bag which was popular in early 2010, but have now faded out. But this is why the handicraft industry remains fun and interesting as new gift ideas keep popping up. This is also what attracts people to handicrafts,” he says.

Currently in trend are embroidery, leather items, UV-cure resin accessories and quilting. Classes available at Yee Button are priced from RM70 to RM700 (four-day quilting course). There are also easy-to-do DIY kits available for sale at the shop. ●

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Art **TRANSCENDS** *all* **BARRIERS**



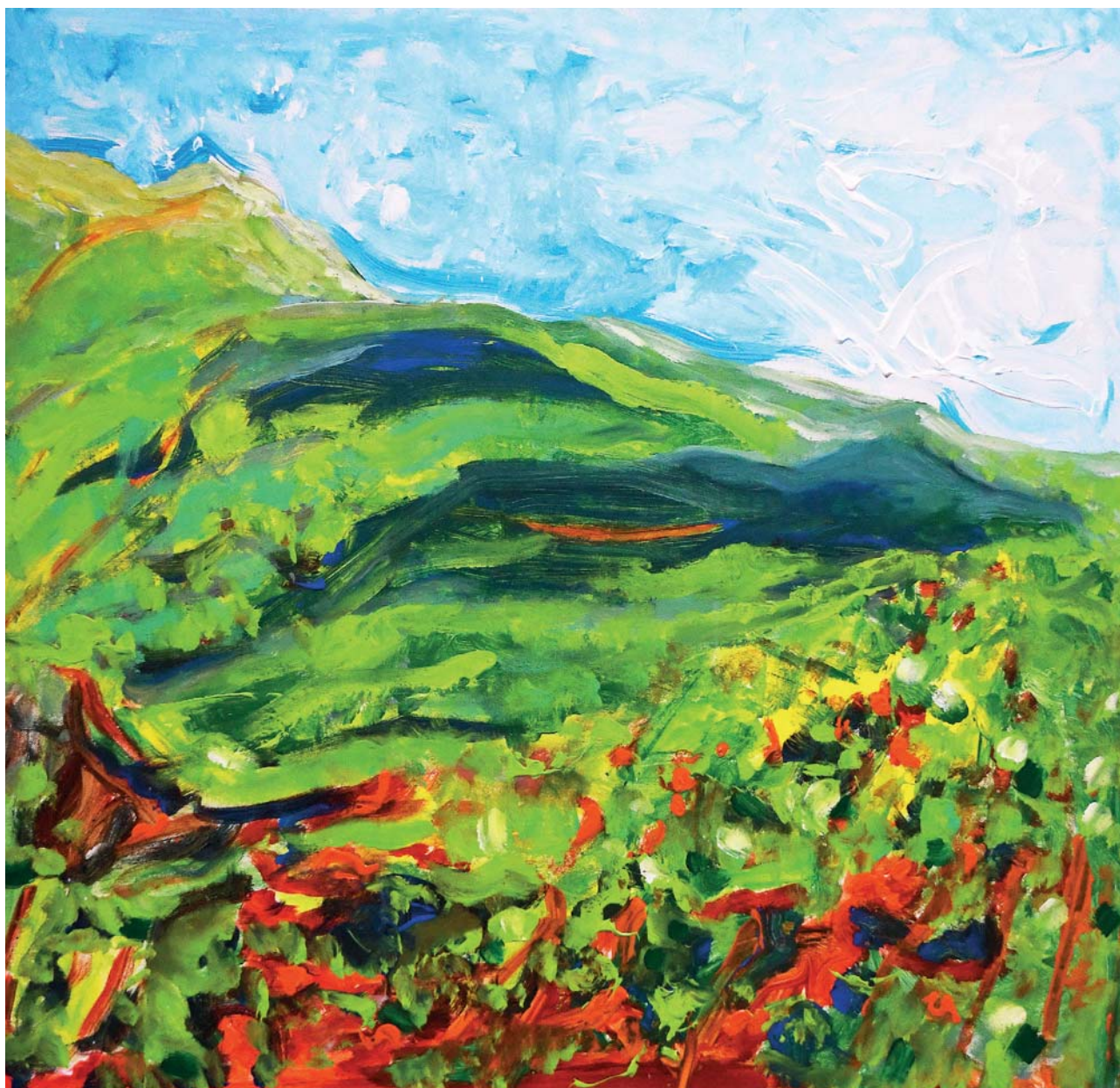
“Painting makes me happy.”

This is the mutual sentiment shared unequivocally by the five extremely talented artists in this feature, whose magnificent works of art are articulated by exquisite detailing, confident strokes and bold colours.

Incidentally, these individuals have something else in common — they are autistic savant artists who have risen above obvious challenges to prove that autism is no barrier to creativity. These award-winning visual artists have carved out and showcased their own identities using art as an eloquent medium for communication and interaction.

Feast your eyes on the following pieces of art by these inspirational artists who have defied the odds to stamp their own inimitable marks on the world.

Text **Anita Kandhavel**



Yuri Azzari Yuri Zaharin

Fiery Mountain, 2018
Acrylic on canvas, 76cm x 76cm

The heavy impasto technique used in this painting brings the fiery mountain to life and invites viewers to appreciate the nuances of the composition from a distance.



Delwin Cheah Wien Loong

The Great Migration, 2018
Ink on paper, 56cm x 76cm

The unbridled energy of galloping zebras, aptly depicted in a flurry of black and white, almost camouflages the presence of other animals and humans in the outer reaches of the canvas.



Dennis Liew Kai Mun

Lavender Valley, 2019
Oil on canvas, 61cm x 76cm

The quaint atmosphere of this bucolic scene not only evokes memories of a carefree walk in the French countryside but also draws us into the pages of a fairytale.



Clement Ooi Kit Meng

Landscape — Dazzling, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 61cm x 76cm

The moody demeanour of the mountains and heavy sky in the background provide contemplative relief for the vibrant and colourful field of flowers in the foreground.



Artjamila (Wan Jamila Wan Shaiful Bahri)

Green Cities Series 1B (KL Metropolitan), 2019

Acrylic on canvas, 91.5cm x 91.5cm

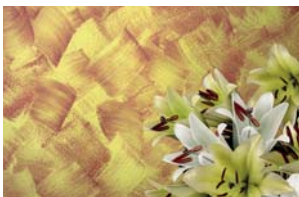
The increasingly pressing need to balance metropolitan development and environmental sustainability is uniquely articulated in this painting which portrays some of Kuala Lumpur's most recognisable landmarks clothed in a kaleidoscope of flora and vegetation.

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