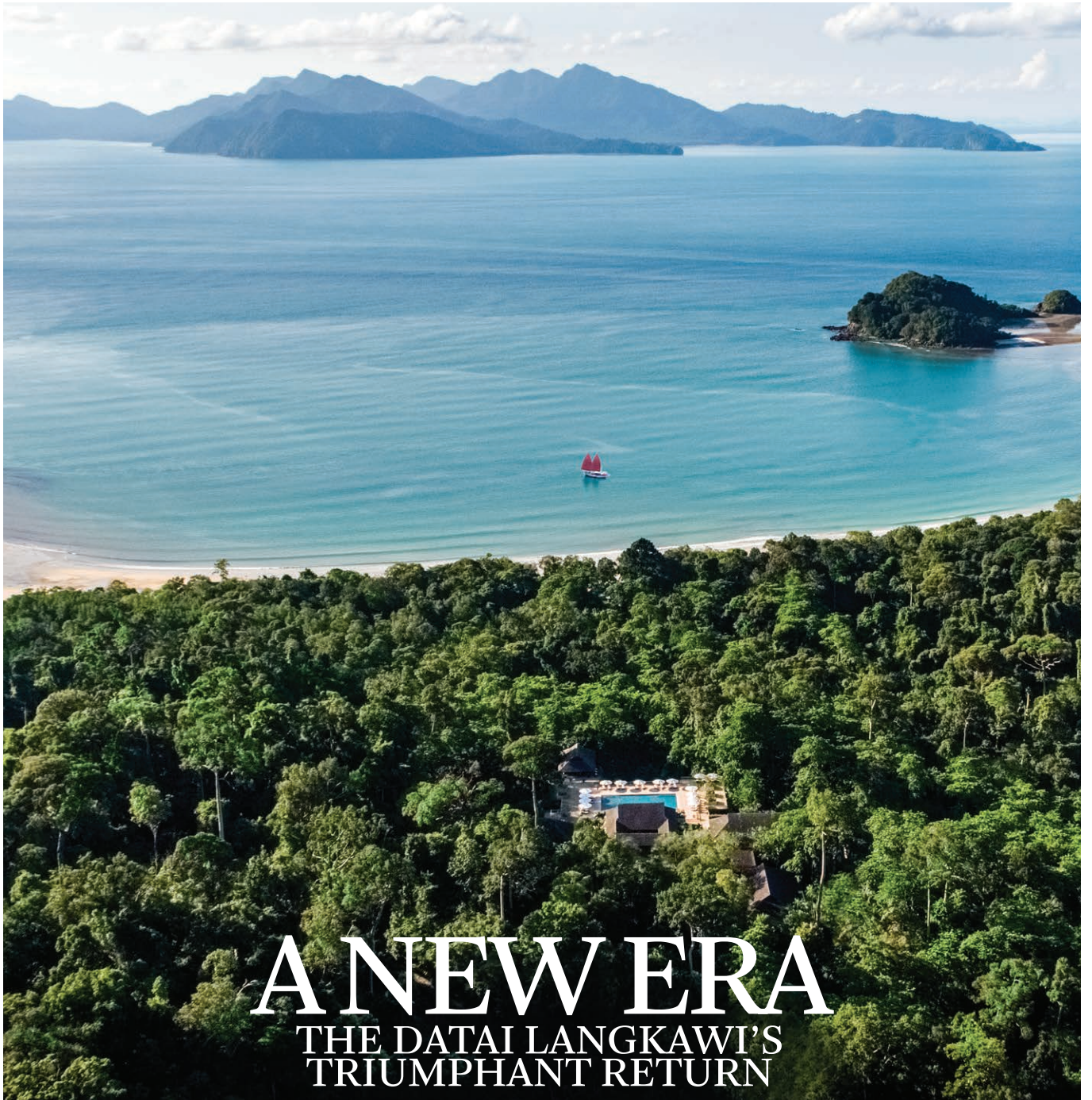


ISSUE #1

IKHILAS

MAGAZINE



A NEW ERA

THE DATAI LANGKAWI'S
TRIUMPHANT RETURN

**IRSHAD
MOBARAK**
GUARDIAN OF
THE FOREST

**KHOON
HOOI**
DESIGN
DESTINY

**MICHELIN
MUSINGS**
LIKE FATHER,
LIKE SON



An exciting new chapter for The Datai Langkawi has begun...



After months of anticipation, it is my pleasure to welcome you back to The Datai Langkawi, and to also introduce you to IKHLAS, The Datai's new quarterly lifestyle magazine. More than just a place to rest your head, The Datai Langkawi has myriad stories to tell, and we decided that IKHLAS was the best way to deliver these fascinating insights to our guests. You may wonder where the name comes from. When you wander down the jungle-clad pathways of The Datai Langkawi, which recently emerged from the largest renovation in its history, you'll see our staff greet you in the traditional Malay style, hand on heart. This concept of genuine, heartfelt service – Ikhlas in Malay – is one of the core values of The Datai Langkawi, and through the pages of this magazine we will present you with stories that capture the essence of our other values, from sustainability to authenticity and hospitality. It's early days in this exciting new chapter for The Datai Langkawi, and in the coming months and years we will continue to showcase the very best in Malaysian heritage, culture, nature and wellbeing to the world beyond. We invite you to join us on this exciting new journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke with a small loop at the end.

Arnaud Girodon
General Manager

IKHLAS

MAGAZINE

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IKHLAS is owned and published by
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IKHLAS is produced by boutique custom publishing agency Artemis Communications Ltd
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Rachel Khiew started out in advertising but her true interest has always been in writing and crafting stories. She took a leap of faith after the agency life to be an independent writer and translator, focusing on interview stories, lifestyle articles and fashion topics. Rachel has more than 10 years' experience in writing and is a long-term contributor with local lifestyle magazines NuYou and CittaBella.



Marianna Cerini is a freelance lifestyle writer and editor based in Hong Kong. For the last eight years, she's been reporting from China on anything from fashion to design, art, travel and architecture. Her work has been published on CNN Style and Travel, Vogue Italia, WWD, Hong Tatler and Forbes among others.



Catharine Nicol travels for adventure, food and wellness retreats, writing and photographing her way around Asia. From her long-term home in Hong Kong she has recently explored sleepy backwaters in Laos, snow fields in northern China and sleepy heritage towns in Rajasthan, trialing local healing and spa treatments as she goes.



David Bowden is a freelance photojournalist specialising in travel, food, wine and any other hedonistic delight. While Australian by birth, he's been in Asia for longer than he can remember and returns to his home country as a tourist. When he's not travelling to the world's best destinations (including many parts of Malaysia) and vineyards he enjoys relaxing with a fine glass of red wine over a good meal.



Sam Bedford is a travel addict making his way around the world to see the places most tourists don't. When he's not having an adventure, he's writing. Sam has published hundreds of articles focusing on Malaysia, Azerbaijan and living a location-independent lifestyle.

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■ Royal Langkawi International Regatta

January 7-12, 2019

LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA

One of Malaysia's most important sailing events, the Royal Langkawi International Regatta draws more than 20 teams from across the region, who compete in six classes as they tack and jibe their way around the country's third largest island. At the 2019 regatta, THA72, which won the Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy in 2017, will be defending its title against stiff competition from sailors from Australia, France, Denmark, Great Britain, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.



■ Singapore Art Week

January 19-27, 2019

SINGAPORE

An annual celebration of visual arts that captivates the imagination of the Lion City each January, Singapore Art Week is organised by the National Arts Council, Singapore Tourism and the Singapore Economic Development Board. The nine-day event, now in its ninth year, showcases a myriad of traditional and contemporary works in galleries, museums, art precincts, independent art spaces and at a series of lavish events that have helped put the city on the regional art map



■ Thaipusam Festival

January 21, 2019

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

One of Malaysia's most colourful and extravagant Hindu festivals, Thaipusam is celebrated by millions of followers worldwide but the best place to experience its parades and traditions is at the Batu Caves outside the capital. The festival is held in honour of Lord Murugan, also known as Lord Subramaniam, and involves worshippers performing awe-inspiring feats of devotion, from body piercing to carrying huge metal frames known as *kavadis* attached to their bodies, in thanks to the Lord for prosperity in the year ahead. Even if you're not a believer, you'll find this display of faith, and the colours and music that go with it, enriching.





■ Sapporo Snow Festival

January 31 – February 11, 2019
SAPPORO, JAPAN

Certainly one of Asia's coolest gatherings, the Sapporo Snow Festival was started in 1950 when school children built snowmen in the city's Odori Park. Today it's one of the largest events of its kind, featuring snow and ice sculptures, many of which are lit up at night, as well as concerts and street food events, and attracting more than two million visitors each year.



■ Penang Hot Air Balloon Fiesta 2019

February 9-10, 2019
PENANG, MALAYSIA

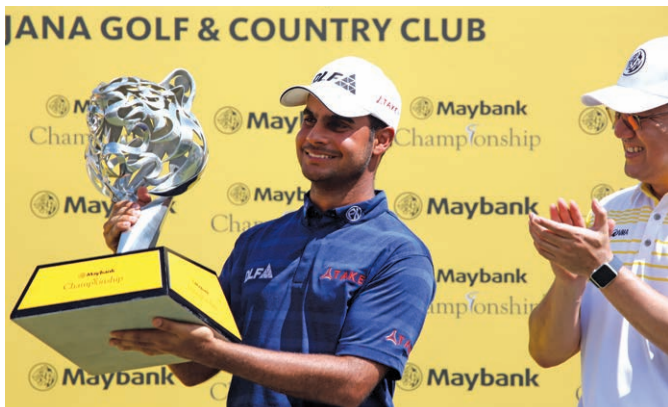
A spectacular event for fliers and fans of terra firma, the annual Penang Hot Air Balloon Fiesta is one of Asia's largest ballooning events and draws thousands of visitors to the Malaysian island. Local teams compete with visiting balloonists from around the world over two days, with creative workshops, light shows and of course, plenty of great street food, on offer. Just be prepared for some early morning starts.



■ Le Tour De Langkawi

March 24-31, 2019
LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA

A thrilling road race that tests the skill and endurance of riders from around the world, the annual Le Tour De Langkawi, named for the destination where the first edition started and finished, has been a fixture on Malaysia's road riding calendar since its inception in 1996. Conceived by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad during his first term in office, the race captures the beauty of Malaysia as riders compete in a series of stages, held in different parts of the country, with an eye on the RM1.1 million (US\$263,000) prize. While the route changes each year, the peaks of the Genting Highlands, located on the mainland, are always popular with riders and crowds alike.



■ Maybank Championship

March 24-31, 2019
SAUJANA GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB, MALAYSIA

Created to build on the vision of players from both the European and Asian Tour, The Maybank Championship also offers the chance for appropriately-qualified ASEAN players to measure up against professional golfers in an internationally-recognised setting. Held at the acclaimed Saujana Golf & Country Club in Selangor, the event is one of Asia's most popular golfing events.

PATTERNS IN NATURE

Architect and interior designer Didier Lefort didn't have to venture past The Datai Langkawi's pristine beach to find inspiration for the resort spa's new look.

Guests arriving for a treatment at the newly-developed The Spa at The Datai might find the intriguing patterns adorning the walls familiar, especially if they've just come from the beach. Tapping into the design DNA of nature itself, Didier Lefort has created a subtle yet immediately recognisable motif that plays perfectly in the spa's holistic persona.

"I was walking on the beach when I was suddenly stopped in my tracks by this amazing pattern in the sand," recalls Lefort, who recently finished an extensive renovation of The Datai Langkawi. "I thought to myself, 'Wow. Who designed this?' I stood there for about 20 minutes to find out what created it and eventually I saw little crabs slowly come out of their burrows to make these little balls with their front legs. With their back legs they pushed the balls behind them and walking sideways, they repeated this process again and again, leaving these beautiful concentric circles in the sand. I calculated that it took them 20 seconds to create each ball; three balls

per minute, and because the tide comes in and washes them away, they do this every day!"

The crustaceans in question were sand bubbler crabs, a common site on the beaches of the Indian and Pacific oceans. The crabs feed by filtering sand, and the result is the little balls of sand that caught the designer's eye. The pattern left by the sand bubbler crabs was ideal for the walls of the spa, a space that – like the rest of The Datai Langkawi – takes its design cues from the natural world.

"For me, the integration and respect of nature with The Datai Langkawi has always been a priority," says Lefort. "So, while every day the tide washes away these marvelous designs, I wanted to give the sand bubbler crabs recognition for their work of art by having them etched permanently on a wall."

For this piece, Lefort turned to soft stone, which he carved to create a living wall mural. "It's going to be quite impressive for guests visiting the spa." Learn more about The Spa at The Datai on pg 54.



SPRING INTO CNY

One of the most important festivals of multi-cultural Malaysia, Chinese New Year is a world-wide celebration of prosperity and family, says **Nick Walton**.

Visitors to Malaysia won't be able to miss the approach of Chinese New Year, one of the trifecta of important cultural festivals in Malaysia that also includes Hari Raya and Diwali. Marking the beginning of a new year on the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, Chinese New Year – sometimes known as the Spring Festival – is 15 days packed with family gatherings, ceremonial snacks, prosperous symbolism and celebration.

Chinese New Year coincides with the new moon, and each year is named for one of the 12 Chinese zodiac signs – in 2019, the Year of the Pig, the celebration begins on February 5 and finishes on the 19th. Chinese New Year is a timeless choreographed celebration – there are things you can and can't do, places you're supposed to be on certain days, and things you should eat to bring good luck. However, at the heart of Chinese New Year is togetherness, community and giving thanks.

Many Chinese Malaysians live in the cities, and the approach of the festival is marked by an exodus as children return home for the traditional reunion dinner, the most important aspect of the celebration, which is held around a round table on the night preceding Chinese New Year's Day.

In the lead up, families will clean their

houses and throw open windows to sweep away ill-fortune and decorate homes in fortuitous colours like red and gold, and with cutout incantations and traditional paper lanterns.

With the New Year's arrival, parents and married couples present gifts of money in traditional red envelopes with the traditional mantra *Gong Xi Fa Cai* or 'may you be lucky', and light firecrackers to ward off *nian* or evil spirits. You'll also hear the cymbals and chanting of mesmerising Lion Dances.

On the first day of the New Year there are also a few no-nos, including washing your hair, lending money, wearing black or white (colours that symbolise death), and doing needlework. Married daughters are also not supposed to visit their parents, although many of these traditions are no longer hard-and-fast rules.

For visitors to Malaysia, the best part of Chinese New Year is the food, which ranges from plump Mandarin oranges, signs of wealth; long Bee Hoon noodles; and dumplings; to poon chooi, a layered casserole; fluffy pineapple tarts; and Yee Sang, a salad of chopped vegetables and peanuts with a sweet and sour sauce that's tossed high in the air by everyone in the family while they make wishes for the year ahead. The higher you toss the more luck you'll have.







THE SECRET'S IN THE RICE

There's nothing like starting the day with
Nasi Lemak, the breakfast that fuels a nation,
discovers **Nick Walton**.

Malaysia is a foodie destination like no other, if not because of the rich cultural influences and the sheer diversity, then for the more curious dishes that have become local icons.

At the top of that list has to be Nasi Lemak, a dish that's beloved across Malaysia, and even internationally as it's served as an authentic local delicacy by the likes of Malaysia Airlines.

Fried chicken, scented rice and chilli might not be everyone's idea of the most important meal of the day, but Nasi Lemak, (or 'fatty rice' in reference to the coconut-soaked rice) has many more champions than critics. A traditionally Malay dish that's been adopted and adapted across the ages, Nasi Lemak consists of rice cooked in coconut milk perfumed with pandan leaf, which bring an earthy sweetness to the stock.

The rice, which was described by Sir Richard Olof in 1909 in his book *The Circumstances of Malay Life*, is topped with spicy *sambal* (arguably the most important component), slices of fresh cucumber (for alleviating the heat), crunchy fried anchovies, known as *ikan bilis*, roasted peanuts, crispy prawn crackers, and a halved hard-boiled egg. This curious combination is often matched with fried chicken, *sambal sotong* or cuttlefish, spicy prawns, or even beef *rendang*, a slow-cooked beef dish that's been exported around the globe.

Across Malaysia, Nasi Lemak is enjoyed for breakfast, sometimes at restaurants or

café tables, more often than not wrapped in banana leaf bundles called Nasi Lemak Bungkus which are perfect for a snack on the go, and while it's traditionally a breakfast dish, its popularity ensures this silky, crunchy collage of flavours and textures is available throughout the day.

Its popularity has also led to many variations, as cultural and culinary influences tweak and evolve the southern and central Malay Peninsula classic. The rice can be scented with ginger or lemongrass, and the *sambal* runs the gamut from sweet to fiery.

In the northwestern states of the Peninsula, Nasi Lemak is often served with fish curry as Nasi Dagang, or in the north-east, with blue-hued rice infused with butterflypea flowers, as Nasi Kerabu. Some Malaysian Indian hawkers will serve Nasi Lemak (made with Basmati rice) with lamb curry, while Malaysian Chinese chefs in Malacca and Ipoh like to blend minced pork into the *sambal*. You'll even find Singapore has its own style, which features sweeter *sambal*, an omelette, and occasionally rice dyed green with screwpine leaves. Even McDonalds experimented with a Nasi Lemak burger.

This iconic dish appears in *Everything Nasi Lemak* by Betty Saw, in The Datai's library, on the In-Room Dining menu, served with shrimp *sambal* and chicken *rendang*, and is sometimes served as Nasi Lemak Bungkus during breakfast in The Dining Room, ensuring you can start your day the Malaysian way.



FIÉ GRIS PEDIGREE

Perfectly suited for warm evening dinners served al fresco, wines made with Sauvignon Gris offer a subtle finesse and a lingering finish.

You can be forgiven for never having heard of Sauvignon Gris. This ancient relative of the Sauvignon family is all too often overshadowed by the popular Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris styles. In fact, the style, which is one of the most obscure grape varieties in the Bordeaux wine appellation, almost met its end during the phylloxera epidemic of the late 19th century. Today, Sauvignon Gris only accounts for two percent of the white wine grapes produced in Bordeaux, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have its proponents.

Also known as Fié Gris, much of Sauvignon Gris' renaissance can be attributed to Loire Valley winemaker Jacky Preys, one of the few winemakers currently producing 100 percent Sauvignon Gris wines, although he has been joined by curious vintners in Chile, Australia and New Zealand, New World wine belts where this underdog grape thrives. Sauvignon Gris has a pinkish hue to its skin (leading to some marketing efforts to rebrand it Sauvignon Rosé) and while its acidity levels are similar to its world-famous cousin, the grape produces higher

levels of sugar, leading to an elegant, richer, more rounded feel. Wines produced using Fié Gris tend to be more voluptuous than Sauvignon Blanc, and exhibit touches of mango and melon, poached pear, apple and guava, as well as crisp citrus.

The wine delivers the freshness that has made Sauvignon Blanc one of the world's most popular wine styles, as well as an additional lushness packed with juicy stone fruit, ripe gooseberry and herbaceous flavours, making it a brilliant wine for oenophiles looking to try something different.

An early ripening varietal with typically low yields, Sauvignon Gris is best matched with lighter roasted dishes as well as grilled white meats and, like Sauvignon Blanc, pairs fantastically with fresh seafood. At The Datai Langkawi look out for the Touraine, Les Roses du Clos, Domaine Xavier Frissant 2017, a fascinating wine made in the Loire Valley by winemaker Xavier Frissant that's packed with aromas of peach, raspberry, roses and sweet spice, with a bracing acidity and a lingering finish.



EASTERN ORIGIN

There's never been a better time to try Japanese single malt whisky, discovers **Nick Walton**.



When whisky purists were asked about ‘New World’ whiskies from the likes of Japan and Taiwan, they would puff out their cheeks and turn a particular shade of pink not unlike whisky that’s been finished in sherry casks. These upstarts, they would proclaim, will never amount to much. Oh, how things have changed.

While far smaller than the Scotch industry of Scotland, Japanese malt whisky is making significant headway among both connoisseurs and collectors, and its rise can be attributed to the efforts of two young visionaries.

Japanese businessman Shinjiro Torii, who transformed his wine import business into Japan’s first whisky distillery in 1924, and his first distillery manager, Masataka Taketsuru, who had discovered his passion for single malt while studying chemistry in Scotland, are often attributed as the fathers of the Japanese whisky industry, a pioneering feat in a country that at the time only consumed sake. Their distillery, Yamazaki, remains one of Japan’s most coveted whisky brands.

“There is no doubt that demand for Japanese whisky has been growing steadily across Asia over the past few years,” says wine and spirit specialist Rickesh Kishnani. “Most whisky enthusiasts remember when Yamazaki Single Malt Sherry Cask 2013 was named ‘Best Whisky in the World’ in Jim Murray’s whisky bible, and it wasn’t long after that a bottle of 1960 Karuizawa (a closed distillery and one of only 41 bottles ever produced) sold for US\$118,500 at

Bonhams in Hong Kong, setting a record (at the time) for the most expensive bottle of Japanese whisky ever sold at an auction.”

In fact, despite such glowing accolades, the greatest challenge facing the Japanese whisky scene is a lack of supply. A slump in the 1980s has resulted in a lack of aged single malt today and as whisky labels like Hibiki 17 (made famous in the Bill Murray film *Lost in Translation*) and Hakushu 12 are discontinued, demand for these spirits, which are made in the same style as Scotch whisky but are often aged in Japanese Mizunara oak, collectors are scrambling to source the market favourites.

“Prices for aged Japanese whiskies such as the Yamazaki 18-year-old or the Hibiki 21-year-old continue to rise as supply is scarce,” says Kishnani. “Bottles of aged Japanese whiskies are sold out often the same day they hit the shelves at duty-free airport stores across Asia and many retail shops in Japan are out of stock. Due to the lack of supply of whiskies aged 18 years and above, Japanese distillers have been forced to respond to demand by releasing non-age statement whiskies (a trend also seen in Scotland). This includes the Hibiki Japanese Harmony, which is presented in a unique bottle with twenty-four facets symbolising the twenty-four seasons of the old Japanese lunar calendar.

The Datai Langkawi boasts a collection of superb Japanese whiskies, including the iconic The Yamazaki Aged 12 Years, The Nikka 12 Years Old, the Hibiki Japanese Harmony, and the blended malt Mars Iwai Maltage Cosmo.



Artist in Residency

The Datai Langkawi's new Artist in Residency programme showcases talent from across Malaysia in a dedicated space that's part gallery part workshop.

Art is so often a passive experience. We see it on a wall, examine it in a gallery, marvel at it when we take it home, but rarely do we get to interact with artists and be a part of their creative process. Until now.

The new Artist in Residency programme at The Datai will introduce artists from a wide range of mediums and from across Malaysia, at The Atelier, an innovative new feature at the newly-reopened resort. Located adjacent to The Boutique, The Atelier brings art and the creative process to life, with artists taking up about 10 day residencies that incorporate art demonstrations, pop-up exhibitions and insightful discussions. Guests can also join artists as they take their art out into the property, seeking inspiration from the resort's spectacular natural surrounds.

Kicking off this exciting new programme are two artists from Sarawak, one of two Malaysian states located on the island of Borneo, each of which is at the forefront of the island's ethnic arts resurgence. Albot Gudang (left at top), a self-taught artist who started making art in 2005, uses natural materials sourced from the rainforest as his canvas, including dried leaves, coconut and seashells, bamboo, stone, roots, and woven sago and tree bark, to create mesmerising pieces that

capture the essence of his homeland of Bau (in Kuching, Sarawak) and the flowing, organic lines used by the indigenous Orang Ulu people. Using a simple paintbrush and black ink, Gudang's pieces bring out the hues of Mother Nature, with the finished works often crafted into purses, ornamental bowls and bags.

Albot will be joined by Senia Jugi (bottom



left), an ethnic Iban master artist who also works with natural materials including rattan, *bemben* or arrowroot, and dyed bamboo shards, which she uses to create the traditional vessels, baskets and mats used by the Iban or Sea Dayaks for generations. A recipient of the UNESCO World Crafts Council Award of Excellence, Jugi has travelled extensively across Asia, keeping the traditions of the Iban people – which were passed down to her by her mother – alive through her

creations. Inspired by the Threads of Life, a weaving tradition Jugi first witnessed as a child growing up in an Iban longhouse, the artist now teaches the next generation of artisans how to craft these large ceremonial textiles, as well as the sacred, multi-tiered *topi tunjang* caps favoured by the Iban men, both for festivals and as commercial ventures.

Legacy of Luxury

Royal Selangor has been at the forefront of Malaysia's pewter scene for over 130 years. **Nick Walton** speaks with Executive Director **Chen Tien Yue** about the importance of family, creative innovation and fostering the next generation of artisans.



*Daily Afternoon Tea
is served in this Royal
Selangor Melon Teapot
at The Lobby Lounge*



Royal Selangor is one of Malaysia's oldest brands. How do you maintain the balance between heritage and the expectations of today's luxury consumers?

Our heritage goes beyond pewter design and craftsmanship. It encompasses a tradition of identifying customer needs and fulfilling them. When we first started in 1885, we were making traditional Chinese altar paraphernalia and then moved on to crafting European-style items which saw great demand, especially from the British and western expatriates in the early part of the 20th century. Today's luxury customers want authentic experiences and to interact with brands and we manage this balance by meeting their respective needs. Pewtersmithing workshops are appreciated by the customers who really value our 133-year heritage in pewter craftsmanship, while newer customers are learning about the brand story through social media and have immediate access to our products anywhere in the world through royalselangor.com.

You're a fourth-generation descendant of the brand's founder - how important is family to the Royal Selangor brand?

The brand story includes how the founding

family continues to be involved today, with some family members managing the business together with a capable team of non-family managers and directors. The wider sense of family we have built in Royal Selangor means many of our employees have been with us over twenty, thirty or even forty years. In a business built on the skills of our craftspeople, this sense of loyalty is invaluable.

Which pieces are Royal Selangor best known for?

We are known for our tableware, wine and bar, and personal accessories. Our product range is quite wide due to the nature of pewter itself. It's a very warm metal that fits into a variety of settings. It's also very malleable, which allows for intricate and detailed motifs that are difficult to achieve with other metals.

The brand has undertaken several collaborations with designers like Nick Munro. What do these partnerships bring to the table?

These collaborations drive the development of pewterware because they enable companies like us to access a wide range of design expertise, which can push the boundaries of the material. It also allows for the creation of mixed media items with enhanced functionality



Royal Selangor
table clock placed
in every room



With so many of your employees with Royal Selangor for decades, how are you fostering the next generation of artisans?

Having worked with the government on the National Dual Training System, an industry-oriented training programme that combines workplace and institutional training, we have seen more young Malaysians joining us because they are genuinely interested in learning the craft and keen to see what can be made out of pewter. In addition, we also have workshops such as The Foundry, where visitors can experience hands-on pewter crafting. We hope these activities will inspire young people to become the next generation of pewtersmiths.

What are the brand's newest creations?

For the end of 2018 we had Savannah and Tranquility. Savannah is a collection of barware and wine accessories featuring an Art Deco interpretation of Africa's lush landscape and abundant wildlife. Tranquility is dedicated to the art of enjoying tea. It features delicately sculpted reliefs of rugged peaks and precipitous cliffs complemented by curvilinear forms derived from the cloud motif of classical oriental art.

and aesthetics. For example, when working closely with Jarrod Lim, a Singapore-based Australian designer, we came up with Crystalline, a collection of pewter-wood accents that complement any table setting.

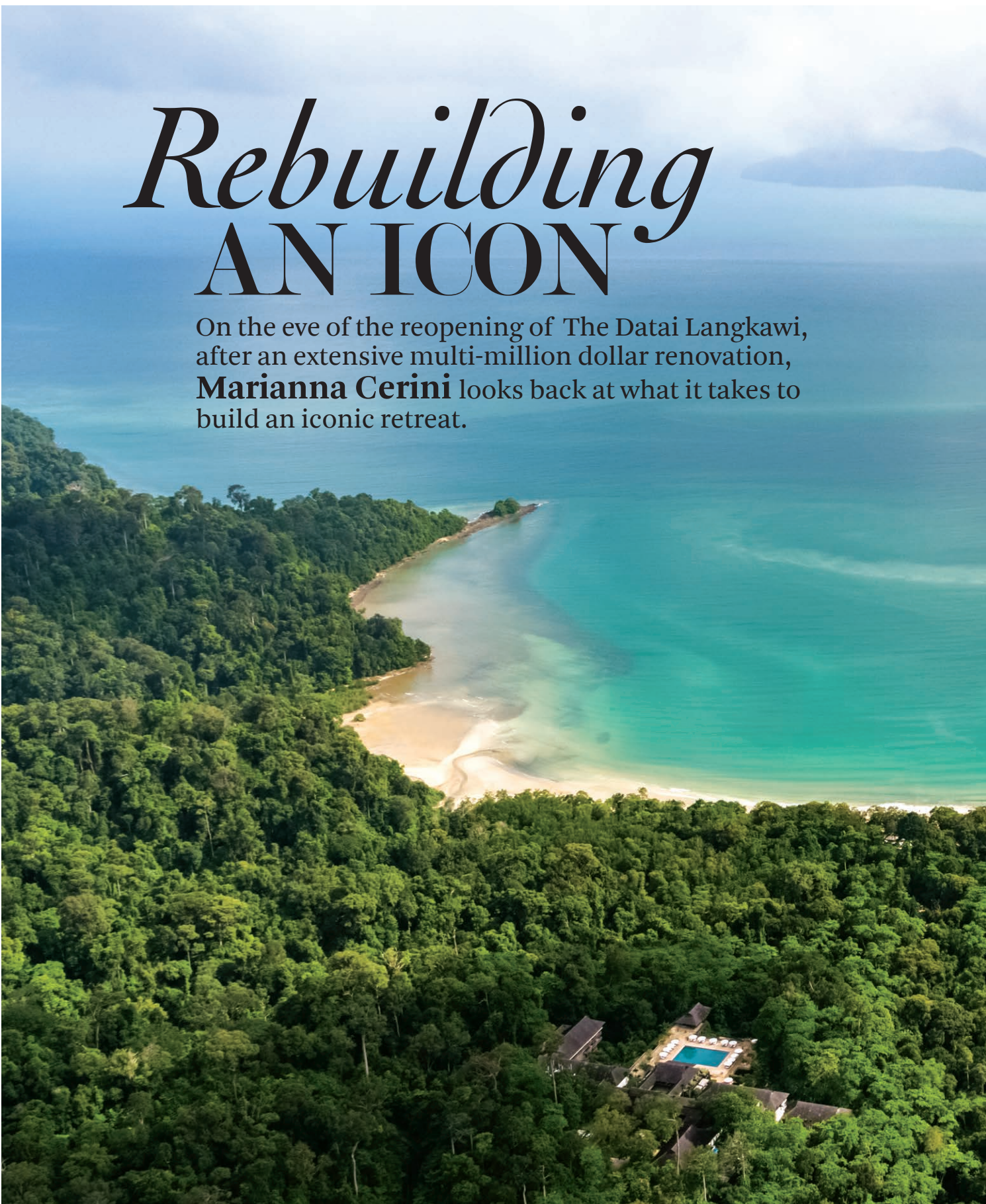
Your pieces can take weeks to produce – how do you balance expectations among today's consumers, who want instant gratification?

From when the collection is conceptualised to when the products reach our customers, the typical duration is 12 months, but our customers appreciate the time we put into the design and production processes. Once we have launched a new collection, we ensure we have the right inventory management systems and processes to minimise stock-outs, so that our customers do not need to wait unnecessarily.



Rebuilding AN ICON

On the eve of the reopening of The Datai Langkawi, after an extensive multi-million dollar renovation, **Marianna Cerini** looks back at what it takes to build an iconic retreat.





Up until the early 1990s, Malaysia had little if no game as far as five-star hospitality went. As with much of Southeast Asia, it was mostly regarded as the destination of choice for the shoestring-budget, ethnic-print backpacker crowd. Then, in 1993, The Datai Langkawi opened its doors and set a new benchmark for luxury in the country.

The resort was ground-breaking for the time. Emerging from a 10-million-year old rainforest and in close proximity to one of the world's most stunning beaches, Datai Bay, it featured beautiful, thoughtful and forward-thinking architecture by the legendary Kerry Hill, an expert of tropical hotel design in Asia.

Rather than being modelled after Western perspectives, it celebrated Malay, Chinese and Indian heritages – the heart of Malaysia's culture. Unlike other properties of the same stature, it didn't impose on its surroundings, but blended purposefully and almost seamlessly with them, incorporating local natural elements of natural timber, stone and lush greenery into its own aesthetic. Instead of playing it safe with the fancy-but-soulless décor that often defines high-end hotels, it boasted discerning tailor-made interiors by French designer Didier Lefort.

Most importantly, years before sustainability became a hot topic, it put environmentalism at the core of its ethos: both Hill and Lefort strived to keep the wilderness of The Datai's unique settings intact and preserve the beauty of the coastline as much as possible during its construction.

It paid off. Over the course of the next two decades, The Datai went on to become one of the most widely acclaimed, most exclusive resorts in the region, often looked at as an



exemplary model of destination hospitality. It was the subject of many a coffee table book, and a recurring name on top travel publications' best hotels lists worldwide. In 2001, Hill and Lefort received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, an architectural prize that recognises projects setting new standards of excellence in architecture, planning practices, historic preservation and landscape architecture, further making The Datai into a successful case study for fellow hotel architects everywhere.

"Simply put, The Datai was a pioneer in the field of nature-centered hospitality," says Arnaud Girodon, current general manager of the property. "And it remained so throughout the years. It was an institution, particularly in Asia."

As such, it could have well rested on its laurels. "But all good institutions need an update every once in a while," Girodon says. "It's essential if one wants to stay relevant." And so, two years ago, an extensive



*A Rainforest
Pool Villa;
a spacious
Canopy Deluxe
bathroom*



(Above) The new look Pavilion serves elegant Thai cuisine; (right) it's easy to be immersed in nature at The Datai Langkawi

renovation project, the most substantial since its opening, was announced for the hotel. The “new” Datai would include a remodelling of the interiors of the guestrooms, suites, villas and public areas, and the addition of new units and facilities arrayed across its 750-hectare rainforest. Lefort was appointed to lead the refurbishment.

“The main intent from the start was to stay truthful to the original concept, and maintain the DNA of The Datai,” Girodon says. “No one could have done that better than Didier, who had seen it come to life in the first place.”

In the span of a few months, Lefort created a more sophisticated colour scheme, streamlined the design and envisioned more contemporary furnishings, while introducing smart lighting and 21st century technology to the rooms – categorised into Canopy, Rainforest and Beach – and around the property.

“We have given it a gentle makeover,” the interior designer says. “Its foundations – from the

materials we used to build it 25 years ago to the symbiotic relationship we created with the jungle back then – still worked, very much so. We’ve only had to add a modern touch to it. The heart and soul were as good as ever.”

Meanwhile, the management set to expand the offerings of The Datai. A new five-bedroom unit, The Datai Estate, has been built over an area of 3,500 square metres, making it one of the largest villas of its kind in Asia.

Extra decadent details, from a 24-hour butler service to private chefs and fine dining options, have been introduced as optional components of the guest experience, but it’s the natural and cultural legacy of the resort that this new iteration has really capitalised on.

In the 1990s and 2000s, The Datai was one of the first hotels in the region to offer patrons educational rainforest walks, and one of the first to appoint a Resident Naturalist, Irshad Mobarak, as part of its full-time staff.





(Clockwise from top left): A Deluxe Canopy room; the iconic swimming pool at The Datai Langkawi is wreathed by the rainforest; the new-look The Dining Room will showcase dynamic fine-dining culinary experiences at the heart of the resort.

Two decades on, the property has made its unique surroundings even more of a highlight. “We’ve worked on elements that are relevant to the new luxury traveller today,” Girodon explains. “Specifically, when it comes to unique experiences based on location.”

One of these elements is a Nature Centre, an open-air building inspired by a tribal bamboo longhouse where guests can expand their knowledge of the rainforest through a comprehensive library and a series of activities run by Mobarak and an expanded team he’s put together. Within it are also two marine biologists, tasked with teaching about sea, river and mangrove life around The Datai.

“We’ve triplicated our wildlife offerings and walks”, says Mobarak, “which only makes sense given the paleo-geological and biodiversity complexity of Langkawi. We have a huge number of butterflies – 60 species around the premises alone, more than you’d find in the UK – stunning marine life and incredible vegetation. Sometimes people come here just for that. The management was very smart in recognizing how important the natural setting is, and how much of a unique position it gives The Datai.”

A spa that specialises in the age-old traditions and philosophies of Malay culture known as *Ramuan* has also been added to The Datai. “It’s a unique

holistic concept that uses healing plants and herbs found in the rainforest,” Girodon says. “It’s a different way of connecting our surroundings directly with the resort and creating a full circle between us and nature.”

Holistic and wellbeing activities – from Malaysian martial art *silat* to yoga based on ancient Indian and Malay principles – are also new on the resort’s programme and aim to emphasise and respect the locality of The Datai.

Then, of course, there’s the increased focus on sustainability. “That’s always been part of what the resort stands for,” Mobarak says. “It was obvious for us to take it a step further.” Recycling, a vegetable garden where guests can pick up fresh produce and spices, sustainable fishing, reduced waste and a ban of single-use plastic have all been incorporated into core aspects of the resort.

“In 2018, respecting and nurturing the environment is mandatory, particularly when it comes to travelling. Our clientele values that very highly. So, it was important to really elevate sustainability in the next chapter of The Datai,” Girodon says. “After all, it’s always been part of our mission.”

Just as it did 25 years ago, the property is looking to remake history in the industry, while staying consistent with what shaped its success in the first place. “Consistency outlasts the test of time”, says Lefort, “and The Datai always had a clear vision of what it wanted to be.”

And that’s an icon, one that has evolved and is always looking to the future.

A New Era





Dining at The Datai

From new chefs to fresh takes on gastronomy, dining has never been as captivating at The Datai Langkawi, discovers **Joe Mortimer**.

Guests who have stayed at The Datai Langkawi often claim that there's something in the air at the resort; something unique that permeates their experience and stays with them long after they leave. Maybe it's the sounds of the bird population that cavort in the treetops, a transient community of sonorous guests that include hornbills, kingfishers and sea eagles. Or perhaps it's the gentle perfume of the rainforest that surrounds the resort, and the light scent of orchids and hibiscus trees that fills the air across Datai Bay.

Ask executive chef Stephen Jones or executive sous chef Jerome Voltat what they think it is, and they'll likely smile and take a bow, confident in the knowledge that the one thing that permeates every aspect of a guest's stay at The Datai, is gastronomy. Food and dining has been an important part of the guest experience at The Datai since the resort first opened in 1993; a time when the concept of food tourism was merely a glint in the eye of ambitious young chefs like Stephen, who has worked in high-profile kitchens across Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and the Maldives during his illustrious career.

The new appointments of Stephen and Jerome breathe fresh flair into the resort following its US\$60 million makeover, with The Datai welcoming two chefs whose experience and imaginations run deep. "This is an exciting platform to develop a new creative expression that is produce driven, and we aim to elevate the overall dining experience across all five outlets, collectively as a team," says chef Stephen.

Set in a traditional Malay kampung-style dwelling, The Gulai House is the resort's signature-dining venue, a magnificent building brought to life with welcoming interiors created by architect and designer Didier Lefort, founder of Paris-based DL2A. Low atmospheric lighting, rustic furnishings and mesmerising views provide the backdrop for an authentic Malaysian dining experience, during which guests can immerse themselves in local customs by dining seated on the floor at low tables in the bersila area.

"At The Datai, it's all about Malaysian hospitality; treating each guest as if they were guests in our own home, with humility, respect, generosity and genuine care," says director of food and beverage Indra Mohan, who oversees all the outlets at the resort, including The Pavilion, which protrudes from the pool area into the treetops, affording breathtaking views across the canopy. Set atop 30 metre stilts, the open-sided restaurant serves traditional Thai cuisine; fragrant dishes infused with the heady flavours of Langkawi's



closest neighbour, just a stone's throw away across the Andaman Sea.

The fruits of the wider Southeast Asian pantry are showcased at The Dining Room, which now features a live kitchen and juice bar, as well as a walk-in wine cellar that's home to arguably the best selection of vintages in Malaysia, according to Indra. Guests can feast on sumptuous spreads for poolside breakfast, light bites for lazy lunches, and a menu of regional fine dining dishes that has all the makings for a long candle-lit dinner.

Down at The Beach Club, the menu takes a more casual approach, with wood-fired pizzas and grilled seafood fresh from the ocean served all day. Sundowners at The Beach Bar are a must, with live jazz providing the perfect soundtrack to the end of another day in paradise. Or, for a truly unique island dining experience, one whisper in the ear of the concierge team and you'll find yourself enjoying a intimate dinner on the beach, or a romantic jungle table in the rainforest; whatever it takes to ensure that dining at The Datai is an experience that stays with you forever.

(Clockwise from top left) Authentic Malay cuisine at The Gulai House; evening dining at the new look The Beach Club; The Dining Room will host a series of exclusive culinary events

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON



The first to kick off a series of culinary encounters at The Datai, father and son chefs Michel and Sébastien Bras take their inspiration from the rhythms of nature, discovers **Joe Mortimer**.

There aren't many chefs in the world who have asked for their hard-won Michelin stars to be revoked. Self-styled culinary bad-boy Marco Pierre White started the trend in 1999, when he "handed back" the three stars awarded to his Hyde Park restaurant. In 2005, French chef Alain Senderens rejected his three stars, noting that he wanted to take his cooking style in a new direction and escape the exacting standards and unrealistic expectations assumed of a three-star restaurant.

In an industry where ever-changing culinary trends and unstable economic climates can affect a restaurant's success, and the strict criteria of Michelin can stymie a chef's creativity, it seems that the highest culinary accolade in the world can be both a blessing and a curse.

For chef Sébastien Bras, giving back the three Michelin stars that he and his father, Michel Bras, had maintained at Le Suquet in France's Aveyron region for almost 20 years, was a matter of freedom of expression. During the restaurant's 26-year history, the father-

considered equal.

"Rooted in the land, the love of terroir and the taste of fine produce, there is nothing like it for inspiring culinary invention, which for me is an obsession and occupies all my waking moments," says Sébastien of his beloved Aubrac. "Nature is the defining influence, for she decides what she provides. Our cooking follows the rhythms of nature."

Michel handed over the reins of Le Suquet to Sébastien in 2009, but the two still form a formidable partnership in the kitchen. It's fitting then that this legendary father-son team were the first to kick off The Datai Langkawi's new Signature Chef Series, which will see international star chefs host a series of special dinners at the resort.

On December 19 and 20, the duo prepared an exclusive eight-course cocktail dinner in The Dining Room, showcasing dishes that celebrated the unique character of the Aubrac region and captured the essence of the land; humble plates like wild-caught turbot pan seared with brown butter and saffron, and

“Nature is the defining influence, for she decides what she provides. Our cooking follows the rhythms of nature.”

and-son-team's philosophy of food has evolved into a well-defined treatise; a set of ideas on the meaning and value of food that began to form soon after Michel took over his mother's family restaurant in 1968.

Describing the cuisine as "delicious home cooking, well prepared" the self-taught chef ran the restaurant for more than two decades, during which he developed a profound respect for the land and local producers. In 1992, he opened Le Suquet with his son Sébastien by his side. Inspired by the vast plains of the Aubrac plateau, their culinary philosophy was about showcasing the quality and variety of the local produce through constant creativity, inspired by the notion that all ingredients should be

Le Suquet favourites such as 'gargouillou', a colourful medley of young vegetables, herbs and sprouted seeds showered in chicken jus that resembles a work of art on the plate.

The choice of Sébastien and Michel Bras to kick off the gastronomic series is no coincidence. The Datai's executive sous chef, Jerome Voltat, has previously worked alongside the Bras men, and draws on that experience to embrace the flavours and ingredients of Langkawi's rich garden to infuse the resort's menus with a sense of place and character.

Tickets for the Chef Series Dinner can be booked at the resort for approximately RM 850+ (US \$205) for the dinner and RM 345+ (US \$83) for the additional wine pairing.

The Datai Langkawi's iconic lobby; General Manager Arnaud Girodon and architect and interior designer Didier Lefort.



Linking The Datai's Past & Present



When architect and interior designer **Didier Lefort** created The Datai Langkawi, he broke the mould for luxury resorts in Asia and beyond. He's now the creative force behind the resort's extensive refurbishment.

By **Marianna Cerini**

Didier Lefort remembers the first time he heard about The Datai as if it were yesterday. Ed Tuttle, designer of the first Aman resorts and a close friend, called him up one day to say Australian architect Kerry Hill was looking for an interior designer for a new luxury property in Langkawi that would mark a new chapter in Southeast Asian hospitality. Lefort, Tuttle believed, would be perfect for the project.

"The ambition around the resort immediately piqued my curiosity," Lefort recalls. "So did Ed's insistence that I would make a good fit. Things happened really quickly from there. Ed put me in touch with Kerry, who shared the schematic drafts for the hotel with me. Then we met, and immediately hit it off."

That was the early 1990s. Lefort, who had recently founded design and architecture studio DL2A in Paris, began collaborating with the late Hill (who passed away in August) towards the creation of a distinctive, elite hotel for discerning travellers,

“From the space to the attention to detail and the minimalism of the décor, we wanted the property to feel like a home for the guests – one that’s sophisticated but not cold, serene but still approachable”



nestled in the heart of a 10-million-year-old rainforest.

“It was my first experience with a structure of this level,” Lefort says. “And it led to DL2A working on a number of other destination resorts afterwards. I like to think it paved the way for our success in the business.”

The chief goal behind the two creatives’ vision was to break with traditional notions of a ‘luxury resort,’ and to provide a new ethos, both in terms of the building and the guest experience, all while keeping the lush, impossibly-green surroundings centre stage. “That was the concept we worked around, always as a team” Lefort says. “We would seek each other’s opinions, exchange comments, input and suggestions for all aspects of the hotel. It was one of the most symbiotic professional relationships I have ever had – and I have done a lot of projects since.”

The result, The Datai Langkawi, opened in 1993, and was hailed as a new benchmark for destination hotels in Malaysia and the region at large. It was a tropical haven with a modern aesthetic, influenced by the cultural heritage and environment it originated from. “It was innovative,” Lefort says. “There’s no better way to put it.”

Although close to the beach of Datai Bay, Hill decided against clearing the jungle around the hotel to make it into a seafront resort. Instead, he set the main building on a forest ridge 40 metres above sea level and 300 metres back from the beach, to preserve the coastline’s natural environment. Lefort used materials and design elements that blended seamlessly and, most importantly, organically with the rainforest, as if the property itself had spontaneously grown out of the rainforest. At a time when sustainability was still far from anyone’s radar, the duo placed the philosophy at the core of The Datai.

The resort also took the concept of hotel design to new heights: everything from the clocks in the rooms to the plates in the restaurants were designed by Lefort and his team. “The spirit was to shape luxury within simplicity,” Lefort explains. “From the space to the attention to details and the minimalism of the décor, we wanted the property to feel like a home for the guests – one that’s sophisticated but not cold, serene but still approachable.”

When The Datai embarked on an extensive refurbishment plan last year, many in the hospitality sector – and quite a number of loyal guests – wondered whether those qualities would be preserved. Three

(Clockwise from top left); The Datai's captivating staircase descends from the main pool; a Rainforest Villa bedroom; one of Lefort's original sketches for The Datai Langkawi; Girodon and Lefort tour the construction site

international design studios were called to present proposals for the renovation, but none managed to impress. Then it was announced Lefort would lead the makeover. "I think the management was particularly keen to keep the identity and legacy of the property", Lefort says, "which eventually made DL2A their obvious choice."

"Being asked to contribute to The Datai again was an opportunity I couldn't pass on," he continues. "Preserving the DNA of a property you've worked on, but injecting it with new life, that's a beautiful, exciting challenge for any architect or designer, even more so when the place holds such an important role in one's career, as this resort does for me."

It's safe to say Lefort has really let that DNA shine through the 'new' hotel. While details such as an earthier colour scheme and more streamlined furniture have been introduced to spruce things up, the essence of The Datai – its eco-conscious focus, for instance – has remained and been enhanced.

The lighting is more energy-efficient. Yellow and red balau, types of wood so readily available in Langkawi and so predominant in the first iteration of the resort, are still very much the prevalent materials because of their lesser impact on the ecology of the rainforest. The white Carrera marble of the bathrooms, which back in 1993 was abundant on the island but has since become scarce, has been replaced by ceramics, which are more ecological.

Just as he did over two decades ago, Lefort has also personally designed a few objects, including some of the furnishings, the amenities displayed in bathrooms, the signage, and some of the lighting.

For the designer, the entire "exercise," as he calls it, was a pure delight, but also a confirmation of the hotel's cachet. "The Datai was not conceived as a destination dictated by 'fashion' or trends, but by good values, solid design pillars, and its own sense of place" he says. "All we had to do was give it an update to bring it into the next decade. And we did; this is a resort that is going to stand the test of time. It already has."







Borneo's Hidden Eden

Danum Valley showcases the best of Borneo's biodiversity, including the world's highest concentration of wild orangutans, the few remaining Eastern Sumatran rhinos, and hundreds of species found nowhere else on Earth, discovers **Sam Bedford**.



Sabah's Danum Valley is like nowhere else on earth. More than 15,000 species of plants thrive in this steamy environment. In some parts, weird bug-eating pitcher plants hang between the trees. Orchids add pinks, reds and yellows to the constant barrage of green in others. Almost 300 types of birds live in the forest canopy, including the recently discovered black-feathered spectacled flowerpecker. Throw in herds of Asia's smallest elephants (pygmy elephants), long-nosed potbellied proboscis monkeys, Horsfield's tarsiers, mousedeer, and elusive clouded leopards and you'll quickly understand why this 130-million-year-old rainforest – a conservancy the same size as Singapore, bursts with life.

Danum Valley became protected in 1995 and at its heart is the Danum Valley Field Centre, a scientific base for researchers that also operates as an ecotourism outpost for one of Malaysia's most important conservation facilities. I've ventured into this remote yet breathtaking ecosystem for a three-day hiking visit with a local guide, Denny, with the hope of spying some of the rainforest's residents, which include black sun bears, sambar deer, clouded leopards and gibbons.

Getting to Danum Valley takes time and preparation, and most visitors book through established tour agencies to ease the logistics. You'll first need to fly to Kota Kinabalu before heading to Lahad Datu in East Sabah. From here, it's a two-



hour drive in a 4x4 along logging roads. However, this is an adventure in itself, with serendipitous encounters with wildlife possible as you draw closer. On the way in, I saw a herd of pygmy elephants on the road and hornbills soaring above the trees. Keep your eyes peeled, and you might too.

I meet Denny on the first day over a breakfast of fried noodles and eggs. Denny, a Sabah local in his 30s, has spent most of his life studying Borneo's ancient jungles. After a quick safety briefing (think poisonous snakes and tarantulas the size of a tennis ball), we head out into a jungle that has, for the most part, been spared the intrusions of man.





Our trail begins in a small opening across the Danum River. A nail-biting walk over a rickety rope bridge and we're at the threshold. Vines and pointy leaves form an unpassable blanket of green between the towering lowland dipterocarp trees on each side of the path. The saturated air suddenly feels heavier on the dark, muddy track as we delve into the foreboding forest. Sweet jungle aromas waft by in faint waves while the insect cacophony reaches deafening levels.

Denny instantly taps into an encyclopaedic knowledge of the jungle and his superhuman ability to identify distant sounds. The never-ending hoo hoo hooing are the Bornean gibbons. We always hear the black primate's echoing howls, but never see them.

Two hours into the trek and a line of red ants, each the size of a large grape, capture my attention. The supersized insects march like a well-trained military unit over every obstacle, including my walking boots. Fifteen minutes later, and the line of ants continues to march by.

Not everything goes to plan in the jungle. An entire ocean's worth of water plummets from the sky within five seconds, I stumble, trip and fall more times than I care to remember, and nightmarish encounters with blood-sucking leeches still make me shudder. It's best to visit Danum Valley between May and September, the drier months, and to avoid the months between November and February when the Valley receives the most rain.

Suddenly I'm drawn to the colossal size of the trees around us. Denny proudly explains the world's tallest tropical tree, at 94 metres, grows in Danum Valley. He also points out the red leaf monkeys camouflaged above and asks if I want a closer look.



More than three-quarters of jungle wildlife lives in the treetops. Canopy walks, rope-bridges passing from one tree to the next 30 metres above the ground, are the best way to explore this vertiginous ecosystem. However, they're not for the faint-hearted. Aluminium ladders attached to tree trunks with rattan vines are the only way up and down. One misplaced step on the narrow rungs and a fall is imminent.

A heart-stopping minute later I'm standing in a treehouse-like hut which provides a spectacular vantage point. Denny soon spots three lime green imperial pigeon on a branch below and a rhinoceros hornbill's nest.

The following day we hike an hour to Danum Valley's pagan burial sites. Before mainstream religion (Christianity and Islam), Borneo's hundreds of ethnic groups were animists. The semi-nomadic Orang Sungai (River People) thrived in Danum Valley's jungles centuries ago. Mysterious wooden coffins with intricate carvings still lie inside crevices in the vertical rock face, next to ceramic spirit jars.

Three days of mud, sweat and leeches later and I'm exhausted beyond belief. However, nothing beats staying inside one of the world's oldest and most important rainforests, and the memories of eating breakfast at Danum Valley Field Centre as an orangutan nursed her baby in a tree less than 20 metres away will stay with me forever.





Guardian of the Forest

Acclaimed naturalist **Irshad Mobarak** has been at the forefront of Langkawi's conservation efforts for decades, and as The Datai enters a new chapter, its Resident Naturalist will launch a series of focused initiatives to ensure this unique ecosystem stays protected and preserved for generations to come.

Words By **Rachel Khiew**

Irshad discovered his passion for the natural world early in life and has been observing animals and building a connection with nature since childhood. Despite being inspired by the work of Professor David Bellamy, a renowned botanist, writer and environmental campaigner, the practicalities of life led Irshad to initially start a career in finance. However, growing restless in the corporate world, the Negeri Sembilan-native finally broke out after a snorkelling trip in Tioman Island, which reconnected him with his passion for nature and showed him his true destiny.

Irshad fell in love with Langkawi some 30 years ago. He continues to be inspired and fascinated by the rainforest as nature itself continues to unfold and reveal its beauty and secrets. Home to 226 bird species as well as over 500 species of butterfly, Langkawi's Mount Machincang remains one of the most biodiverse destinations on the planet. Irshad believes strongly in sharing and has done this through various channels, including numerous talks, documentaries, a book and his famous trail walks around Langkawi over the years.

"I truly feel that every day is special here in our rainforest, and that is because nature continues to evolve and continues to fascinate me," says Irshad. "The characters that I have come to endear, like the Great Hornbill and White-bellied Sea Eagle, continue with their saga of life trials. To see the smallest creatures like a pair of male butterflies fighting each other for the favours of a female never ceases to amaze me."

In 1993, Irshad Mobarak joined The Datai Langkawi as the property's Resident Naturalist. He has since worked hand-in-hand with the luxury resort to protect and preserve its dramatic rainforest setting through a series of conservation efforts, most notably the creation of wildlife corridors, which counteract the fragmentation of natural migration routes and allow animals to roam safely and freely in their habitats.

"When I joined The Datai in 1993, the forest was already abuzz with wildlife.

"I like to describe myself as an optimistic conservationist. We are a rare breed."

Through the years, the flora and fauna has maintained its balance and continues to do so. In short I could say that there has been no change [after the development of the resort] because everything is in balance and nature continues to thrive."

With the reopening of The Datai Langkawi, Irshad believes that it is the environment in which the resort is situated that is the true winner. With an unprecedented focus on education and the preservation of the island's fragile ecosystems, The Datai has grown its one-person Naturalist role into a team of six, including two naturalists, two marine biologists and two nature hostesses. The extra manpower will allow the resort to triple its nature-related activities. The nature team has also upgraded two of the existing nature trails - on which Irshad leads guests of The Datai on fascinating tours of the rainforest - and created the Rimba Trail, which incorporates a mangrove boardwalk, a canopy walkway and a viewing tower.

Another initiative of Irshad's has been the creation of The Datai Trust, under which four components - Fish for the Future, Wildlife for the Future, Youth for the Future, and Pure for the Future - focus on sustainability and giving back to both the environment and the people that call this unique landscape home.

"I like to describe myself as an optimistic conservationist. We are a rare breed," says Irshad. "I believe that if we're intelligent enough to learn from nature, and to adapt as evolution has taught us, then we still have a chance to undo the harm we've done to our planet. Above all, we must try to learn from nature and try to adapt quickly."



DESIGN DESTINY

Since launching his label in 2000, Malaysian fashion designer Khoon Hooi has earned a reputation at home and abroad for his elegant, high-quality collections, making him an ideal choice to design the new staff uniforms of The Datai Langkawi.

You graduated from the Malaysian Institute of Art in 1993. Did you always want to be a fashion designer?

I have never once considered any other career option. I started to appreciate fashion by observing my late grandmother's intricate kebaya embroidery work. She has definitely influenced and inspired me to be who I am today.

How would you describe your design journey from those early days to launching your own label?

I have definitely gone through an evolution where it used to be more of what inspires me... design possibilities are endless. These days it's all about merging fantasy with the reality of market needs.

You recently designed new staff uniforms as part of The Datai's re-opening. What inspired the new designs and how do you manage the balance between aesthetics and practicality?

Distinctive style meets utilitarian practicality. We applied subtle details like breathable fabrics, fabric belt pouches, aprons with tablet pockets, skirts with the ability for easy movement, trousers with expendable waists, and the like.

How do you see the Malaysian fashion design scene evolving?

Customers are now willing to try local brands. However, there are a lot of new players in the market and they need to know that fashion is not only about being creative but embracing the commercial side of it, understanding the A-Z journey of production and how to manage client relationships.

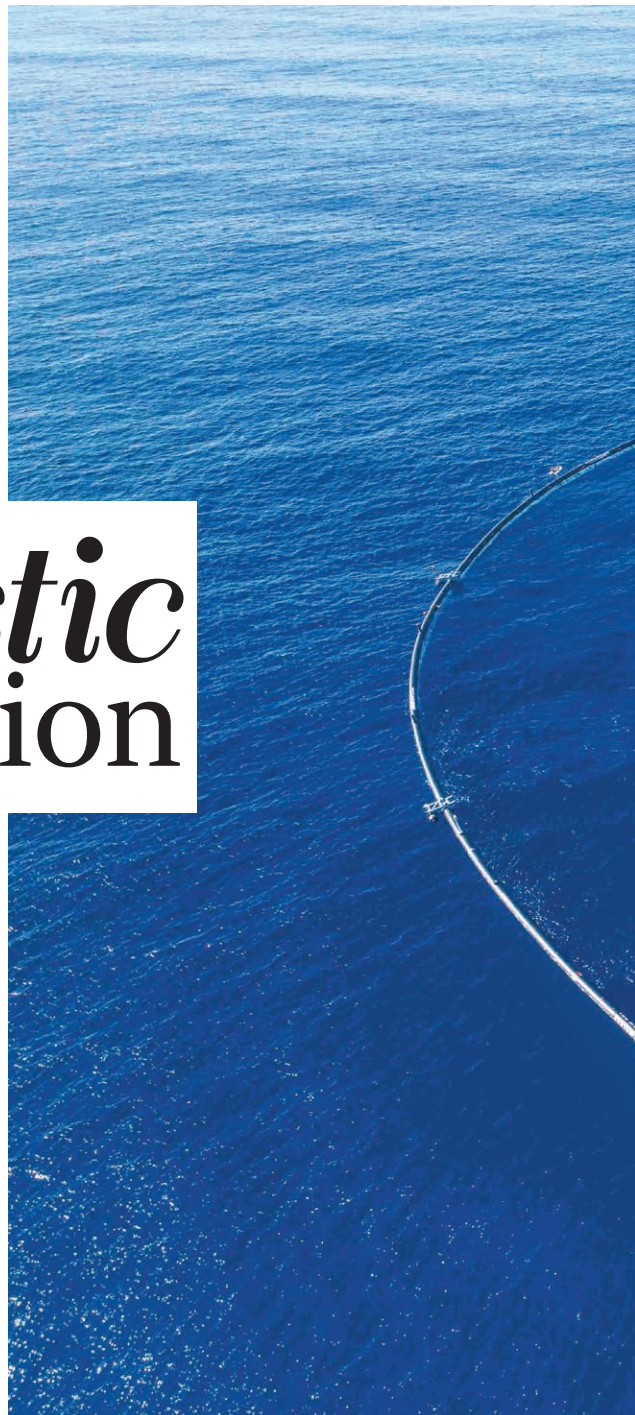
What can be done to further bolster the Malaysian fashion design colleges?

This is really an education piece where design colleges need to hire the best in the industry to prep future generations on how the business works and teach them how to stay committed in their field. The Ministry of International Trade & Industry needs to also support local talents by providing them with financial assistance and host trade events during fashion weeks in major fashion capital cities.

What is next for Khoon Hooi?

Growth in global market share of the occasion wear category; and, to be stocked by major e-retailers as well as brick and mortar stores.





The Plastic Pollution Solution

It is known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and experts predict that if we continue to disregard it, the planet will eventually choke from this mass of plastic pollution. Fortunately, one young eco-pioneer may have a solution, discovers **David Bowden**

Environmental issues rank as one of the biggest concerns for Millennials, and one young Dutchman realised in 2011 after a Greek diving holiday, that enough was enough. Seeing more plastic than fish while diving, Boyan Slat set about doing something positive for the environment. Discovering that plastic takes hundreds of years to degrade and that decades of accumulated waste was slowly choking the seas and killing marine life, especially in an area twice the size of Texas that was dubbed the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) when it was first identified in 1988, Slat founded The Ocean Cleanup (TOC) in 2013 to finally tackle maritime plastic pollution once and for all.

Having raised over \$US30 million, Slat's non-profit organisation has been working on developing and testing advanced technologies to collect trash using a series of floating barriers and screens that filter plastic from the seawater. Feasibility studies involving 70 scientists and engineers were conducted with the aim of removing 50 percent of the plastic patch – home to 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic and counting – every five years.

Their plan is to deploy a series of 600 metre-long, passive floating, u-shaped barriers that rely upon wind, waves and currents to direct floating plastic into screens extending down three metres from the barriers. The configuration of each barrier concentrates the plastic in one area for harvesting,



Photos By **The Ocean Cleanup**



sorting, processing and recycling. The time from harvesting to recycling is expected to be six months, with the funds raised from recycling to be used to continue the clean-up efforts. The system launched in late September after a three-week trial run and is bound for the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, one of five such patches identified, which collectively accumulate a significant portion of the 320 million metric tons of plastic waste dumped in the oceans each year.

The team of scientists has also worked on preventing bycatch – the unintentional trapping of marine life – and biofouling – when marine organisms latch onto and weigh down the barriers. To tackle the first issue, TOC designed barriers that allow marine life such as fish and turtles to pass through the screens without risk of being trapped.

“If we make the technology work, the clean-up will happen,” said Slat at the end of the San Francisco Bay trial of System 01, the first booms, which took place 240 nautical miles into the Pacific Ocean. “The trials are essential, as the team needs to understand the problem before being able to solve it.”

The success of the project is dependent upon the barrier moving faster than the plastic. After several weeks of testing, the team reported the good news that the system had stayed intact, and while there were reports of damage to the screen, the team of experts decided after the three-week trial to continue onwards to the GPGP, which is

“Technology is the most potent agent of change. It is an amplifier of our human capabilities.”

- Boyan Slat

situated halfway between California and Hawaii.

“The real celebration will come once the first plastic returns to shore,” says Slat. “After 60 years, mankind has been putting plastic into the oceans; from that day onwards, we’re taking it back out again.”

In late October, the team reported that there will be plenty of opportunities for System 001 to prove itself in the months ahead and they remain hopeful that the clean-up system will continue passing a series of planned tests, with the ultimate goal of having 60 barrier systems focussed on the GPGP over the next two years.

While TOC predicts that 90 percent of all ocean plastics could be removed by 2040, Slat also has his critics, who cite the high costs and inefficiencies of System 01, which targets larger pieces of trash found near the surface, and misses the microplastics – plastic broken down into minuscule pieces by the oceans, as well as resin pellets used in plastic manufacturing and

microbeads used in health and beauty products – that are playing havoc on the ecosystems of the world’s oceans. However, Slate's youth, his energy, and his bold solution have created awareness of one of the planet’s biggest environmental crises, and therein lies a small victory.

Long Journeys Start with Small Steps

Cleaning up the mess is one thing but stopping the garbage patch expanding is the bigger issue. Unpolluted waters are essential for seaside resorts like The Datai Langkawi, and the property’s The Nature Centree team is keenly interested in environmental initiatives such as TOC. Eliminating plastics flowing into the sea off The Datai is an important focus for the resort, and Quality Control and Improvement Manager Remi Giromella has been tasked with implementing The Datai’s ground-breaking sustainable environmental practices.

A priority at The Datai is to eliminate single-use plastics, including plastic water bottles, and the resort now offers guests drinking water from specially-sourced steel flasks, while in-room amenities like toiletries are stored in containers made from natural materials, and toothbrushes, razors and combs incorporate sustainable bamboo rather than plastic.

“In addition to the three Rs – reduce, recycle and reuse – staff are focused on rethinking the way they interact with the environment,” enthuses Giromella. Guests are encouraged to do the same, with environmental education an essential part of all activities conducted at the new The Nature Centre.

While these actions are small, they support the idea that every large movement starts with small and simple steps. Boyan Slat claims there is a pollution solution, and resorts like The Datai are doing their part by championing sustainable environmental practices that just might help the young Dutchman realise his vision.

How to be a More Sustainable Traveller

- *Don't use plastic straws.*
- *Travel with a refillable aluminium water bottle and stop buying water in plastic bottles.*
- *When staying in hotels, use travel operators that have implemented sustainable practices.*
- *Travel with a reusable cotton shopping bag and refuse plastic bags.*
- *On forest walks, take out what you take in - nothing more, nothing less.*
- *Turn off your air-conditioning when you're not in your room.*
- *In addition to the three R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle), rethink your approach to, and your impact upon, the environment.*
- *Join a rainforest or beach walk with our Resident Naturalists and Marine Biologists to learn about Langkawi's various ecosystems and ways to become an eco-warrior.*



Nature Meets Nurture in Langkawi

Newly relaunched, The Spa at The Datai has gone back to Malaysia's healing traditions to create treatments ideal for modern-day guests, discovers **Catharine Nicol.**

Perhaps you've heard of forest bathing, but how about rainforest bathing? At the newly re-launched Spa at The Datai Langkawi, unique rainforest walks introduce guests to a living apothecary of healing plants before they relax, soaking up the ancient forest's sights, sounds and scents in one of the new-look luxury open-air treatment villas. Sinking into a massage or simply embracing the serene setting over a cup of herbal tea, you soon realise that the real luxury is being surrounded by the comforting oxygen-rich breeze, the musical pitter-patter of the rain and distant crash of the waves, the calls of birds during the day and the chorus of cicadas at dusk.

More than a spa treatment, this adventure into nature takes you to the opposite extreme of the usual concrete jungle and everyday preoccupations. A boardwalk stroll leads to a warming welcome tea and a footbath, total immersion into views of the forest, stream or mangroves, and ancient healing for your modern-day body, mind and psyche.

While the rainforest lends the perfect healing atmosphere and

soundtrack, being home to a natural apothecary of plants, herbs and flora means The Spa uses carefully blended forest-to-flask ingredients in their oils, scrubs, masks and teas. Following the philosophy of *Ramuan* (traditional Malay healing), treatments use recipes and modalities passed down from generation to generation, many echoing practices of royal healers, both past and present-day.

Highly recommended is the Urut Melayu; The Spa's signature treatment is based on the deeply therapeutic and practical massage techniques found in villages and healthcare centres across Malaysia. Designed to increase circulation, relax and comfort the body, the treatment brings inner balance, helps repair muscles and banish aches and pains.

For the ultimate Malaysian wellness day, the signature Seven Flowers and Seven Spices treatments use floral ingredients like ylang ylang, white lotus, and rose, or spicy notes like cinnamon, cardamom, and pepper, as used by traditional Malay royal healers. The seven-hour journeys include steam, sauna and Jacuzzi





sessions, a body exfoliation, mask and massage, facial and hair treatment, foot care, and a *Ramuan* lunch within the magical rainforest sanctuary.

Other treatments feature ingredients like activated charcoal, seaweed and pearl. River stones are heated for a massage called *Tungku Batu* (heart of stone), which uses oils infused with ginger, lemongrass, lime and galangal and is recommended to alleviate tension while increasing circulation and reducing toxins.

Local traditional Malay medicine legend Dr Ghani collaborated on the spa menu, and also created the range of healing teas for The Spa, while a local perfumist and an aromatherapist worked together on The Spa's own natural and organic collection.

Alongside Malay experts, France-based Bastien Gonzalez brings his podiatry-based feet and hands healing in treatments that go far beyond a mani-pedi into therapeutic healing territory. In addition, imported from Switzerland, the organic, vegan PHYTO5 skincare range focuses on the natural energy of plant-based ingredients to aid body therapies and Holistic Harmony facials, increasing

the vibrations of the body and mind. PHYTO5 facials move from scent-based diagnostics to emotional consults and then one-on-one advice on your complexion, for treatments that go on to affect the whole body.

Ending the *Urut Melayu* (and other treatments) with movement, *Senaman Tua* is a Malaysian philosophy of stretches and breathing that taps into your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Movement cements the feeling of overall calm, contentment and well-being, bringing you back into the now to reconnect with the luxury of nature, with the living, healing rainforest, and with yourself.



Langkawi Links



One of Asia's most dramatic and coveted golf courses prepares to welcome a new generation of guests at The Datai Langkawi.

For golfers of all skill levels, a visit to The Datai Langkawi isn't complete without a chance to play at The Els Club Teluk Datai, an iconic Ernie Els-designed course that winds its way through a pristine, million-year-old rainforest and along Langkawi's mesmerising coastline. The third property in a collection that also includes Els-designed courses in Desaru Coast, Johor, Malaysia, as well as in South Africa and Dubai.

The Langkawi course put the Malaysian island on the golf map when it opened in 1992 and has subsequently won several awards, including The Most Scenic Golf Course in Malaysia, high praise in a nation with more than its fair share of stunning links.

In 2014 the course was completely overhauled and reopened as The Els Club Teluk Datai, an 18 hole/par 72 championship course managed by Troon Golf that reaches across an expansive 3,200 hectare estate that tumbles down the flanks of the Machincang Mountains and hugs the Andaman Sea.

An example of sustainable golf course development, The Els Club Teluk Datai embraces its stunning location; fairways are lined by endemic hardwoods and palms, and resident monkey troops and exotic bird species keep a sharp eye on golfers as they tackle fairways that follow the undulating rhythm of a lush landscape punctuated by ancient, towering trees and flowing streams.

The course boasts a fleet of GPS enabled golf carts as well as a comprehensive golf clinic, the perfect spot at which to hone your swing before trying your hand at one of the course's most iconic holes – a signature 170 yard/par 3 that leaps the waters of the Andaman – that remains a true draw card for serious and resort players alike.

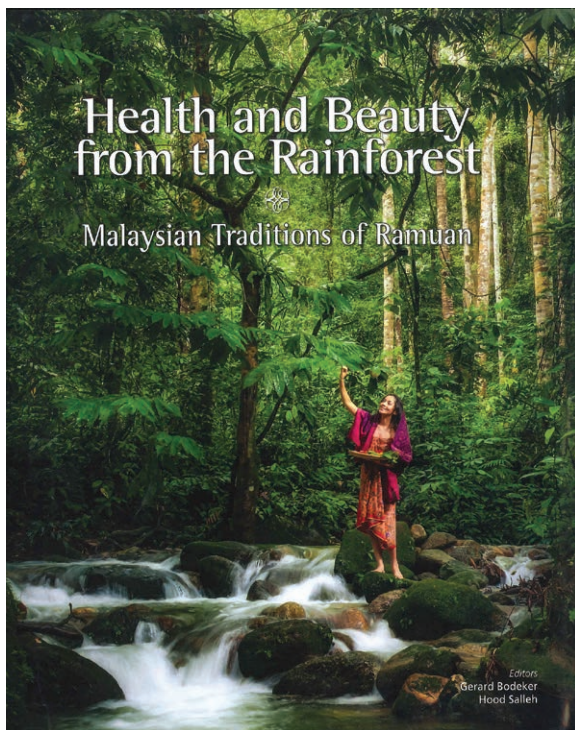
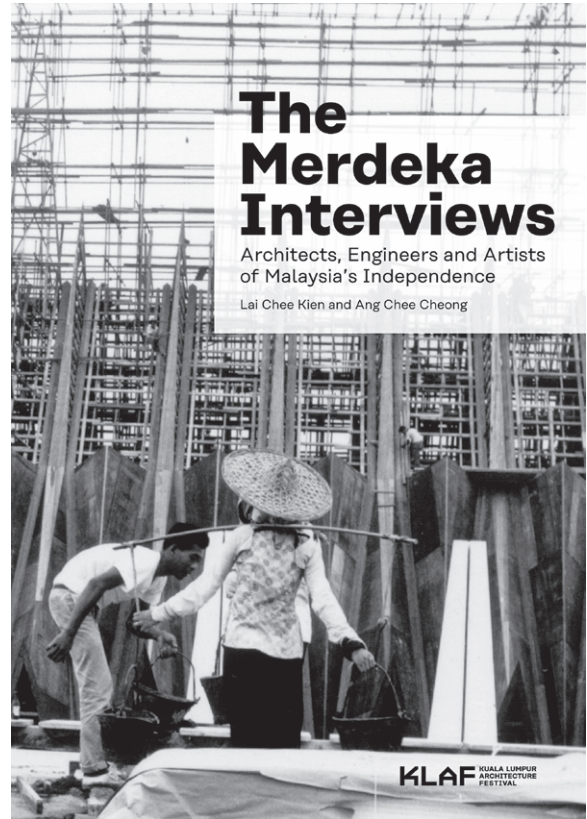
Beyond the fairways, there's a contemporary clubhouse that features a pro shop, the Hornbill Café, a casual restaurant, and the Els Lounge, a serene open-air lounge on the clubhouse's upper level that boasts stunning views of the valley.

The Merdeka Interviews: Architects, Engineers and Artists of Malaysia's Independence

Authors: Lai Chee Kien & Ang Chee Cheong

Publisher: Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia;
RM150

Offering a unique insight into the architecture that has helped define modern day Malaysia, *The Merdeka Interviews* tells the tales of a nation in its infancy through the landmarks constructed during its fledgling independence. From Parliament House and Universiti Malaya to the buildings of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the custodians of the Malay language, Malaysia's independence signalled a new era for the country, one in which architecture played a crucial role. Inspired by a speech by the country's third Agong, Al-Marhum Tuanku Syed Putra ibni Al-Marhum Syed Hassan Jamalullail, in which he linked the virtues of citizenship with key buildings and institutions, *The Merdeka Interviews* chronicles the rise of homegrown architecture and the development of keystone buildings, from Subang Airport (also known as Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport) to the sprawling Stadium Merdeka (*Independence*), through a series of insightful interviews conducted by architectural historian Dr Lai Chee Kien and architect Ang Chee Cheong. Paying homage to the inspirators who helped put Malaysia on the world map, including leading engineers, architects and artists, this exhaustive work is a must for design lovers looking to embark on a journey of nationhood.



Health & Beauty From the Rainforest: Malaysian Traditions of Ramuan

Authors: Gerard Bodeker, Hood Salleh

Publisher: Didier Millet, CSI;
RM66.30

Malaysia is home to some of the oldest rainforests in the world (some of the most exquisite, you might have noticed, surround The Datai Langkawi) and from these rich forests come the ingredients for *Ramuan*, traditional Malay medicinal remedies that have been used for centuries. In *Health and Beauty from the Rainforest*, experts in traditional medicine, including professor Gerard Bodeker, a senior faculty member in public health at Oxford University; Dr Christof Jaenicke, a physician and respected clinical nutritionist; and Dr Ruzy Hashim, an author and associate professor at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's School of Language Studies & Linguistics, impart their knowledge of the natural world through stories, folklore and recipes, all of which is paired with lavish and inspiring photography.

All prices were correct at the time of publication. All books are available at *The Boutique*, *The Datai's* retail concept, or at *Borders* bookstores in Kuala Lumpur or online at www.borders.net.my.





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