

ISSUE #4

IKHILAS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DATAI LANGKAWI



**IBAN:
CHILDREN OF
THE FOREST**

**GOING
TO THE
BIRDS**

**LANGKAWI'S
STINGLESS BEE
HONEY**

**HEALING
FROM THE
ROOTS UP**



WITH GREAT CHALLENGES COME GREAT OPPORTUNITIES



Greetings from Malaysia and our green paradise of Langkawi. Like the rest of the world, this lush haven has not been spared by the dreaded pandemic, with the Malaysian government deciding early in the year to contain the spread by closing borders and controlling movement across the nation. Despite the bleak and desolate situation that was 2020, we see light at the end of the tunnel, specifically with the recent announcement of a vaccine.

At The Datai Langkawi we continue to work on a host of ambitious new sustainable initiatives and the effects of the year have only acted as a catalyst to double down on our efforts. As part of our sustainability and outreach programmes, we have set up partnerships with local NGOs and social enterprises (*read more on page 42*) that were selected for their passion to protect the environment; we have uplifted the younger generation and provided safe havens for endangered species, be it in the rainforest or at sea; have worked with local schools to educate children on green practices; and have built fish aggregating devices and created coral nurseries in the bay in front of the resort.

In addition, we have strengthened our efforts to eliminate single-use plastics from the resort and almost reached our goal of zero waste going to landfills. Through these measures and many more, in just over a year we have managed to save hundreds of thousands of plastic and glass bottles from being discarded, created our own permaculture garden using organic waste composting, recycled and upcycled tonnes of items used in our resort operations (*read more about The Datai Pledge on page 46*), and have managed to outreach to vulnerable local communities.

If there is one thing this pandemic has taught us, it is that we must learn to co-exist with nature with humility and respect. We have found that implementing measures to support each other and the natural world around us lifted the spirits of our colleagues, even during the hardest phase of the pandemic.

We look forward to introducing all returning as well as new guests to our ambitious programmes and are happily awaiting the reopening of borders to international travellers next year.


Arnaud Girodon
 General Manager

IKHLAS

MAGAZINE

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A MEMBER OF



THE LEADING HOTELS
 OF THE WORLD

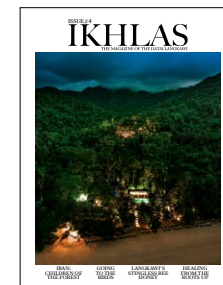


Photo by William Watt

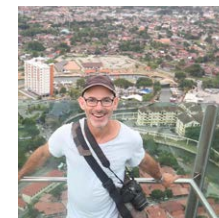


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Contributors



Simon Richmond is a UK-based freelance writer and photographer with over 25 years of experience of researching and writing travel guidebooks. He's been a regular visitor to Malaysia since the mid-1990s and is the lead author of Lonely Planet's Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei guidebook. In this issue, he explores the melting pot of Melaka.



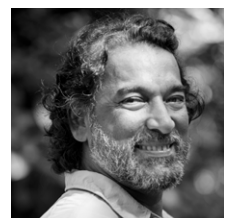
Richard Lyon, a retired architect, is the author, with Jean-Yves Le Lan, of 'Finding The Ring Of Truth', which recounts the odyssey of obtaining official recognition of an unidentified WWII grave in Brittany for the author's uncle, F/O Russell Lyon, a Spitfire Pilot with RAF 234. In this issue, he discusses his book and time at The Datai Langkawi.



Thomas Bird exchanged the anemic setting of his suburban adolescence for East Asia in 2005 and hasn't looked back since. Somewhere along the line he managed to pick up a Master's degree in Chinese Studies, although his writing is not exclusively concerned with the Sinosphere. In this issue, he profiles Lisette Sheers of Nala Designs and seeks out Langkawi's stingless bee master.



Sharmila Rajah has been writing for more than two decades, on everything lifestyle oriented, plus copywriting and editing. She has contributed to numerous publications within the region and beyond. She loves acquainting herself to a new city by visiting its art galleries, restaurants, and theatres; and yields to sea and sand to unwind. In this issue, she explores the works of local NGO SALAM Langkawi.



Irshad Mobarak, Head Naturalist at The Datai Langkawi, has been a keen nature lover since his childhood. Inspired by the lives and deeds of pioneer naturalists and explorers such as Alfred Russel Wallace and botanist, writer and environmental campaigner Professor David Bellamy, Irshad left his banking career and walked down the path of natural history. In this issue, he discusses the resort's winged migratory visitors.



IKHLAS

Contents

8
VISION
THE DATAI
LANGKAWI APP

10
DESIGN
TRADITIONAL
COUTURE

12
CULTURE
CHILDREN OF
THE FOREST

16
THE DISH
THE TALE
OF TANDOORI

20
THE ATELIER
REDEFINING THE
WORLD AROUND US

24
OUR PEOPLE -
IN MEMORIAM
A MIND
FOR HEALING

IKHLAS

Contents

28
IN THE KITCHEN
TWIN
INSPIRATION

38
CREATIVE MINDS
DESIGNER
LISETTE SCHEERS

42
COMMUNITY
GOING THE
DISTANCE
TOGETHER

46
THE DATAI PLEDGE
FORGING A
PATH FOR
THE FUTURE

50
NATURE
GOING TO
THE BIRDS

54
OUR ISLAND
THE BEE'S
KNEES

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

The Datai Langkawi app brings the resort's many people, activities and initiatives to life for both new and returning guests.

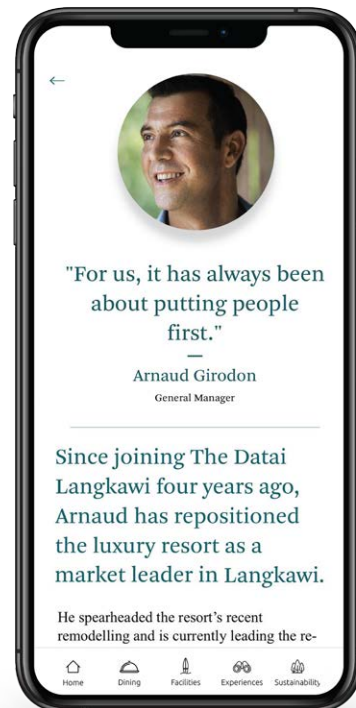
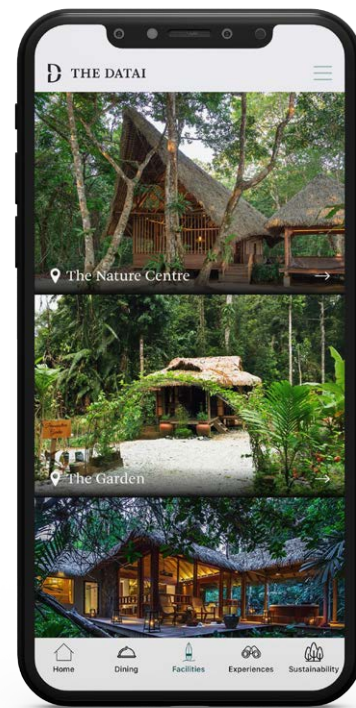
Guests who have visited The Datai Langkawi will be the first to attest to how many things there are to see and do at the property. From walks through the ancient rainforest and along the pristine shoreline, to culinary events, workshops in The Atelier, and treatments at The Spa, there's always something happening and now guests can stay in the know with The Datai Langkawi's dedicated app.

With a raft of information covering everything from menus from The Spa and resort restaurants, and Ikhlās magazine, to weather and tide information, and a schedule of weekly activities, the easy-to-use app not only showcases essential information for guests but also delves deeper, with background features on sustainability initiatives, resident flora and fauna, and the people that make The Datai Langkawi so special. Want to learn more about unique wellness journeys like Forest

Bathing? Interested in learning about Malaysian cuisine, how the resort supports upcycling workshops, or which local artists are visiting The Atelier? The app, available for Android and iOS, has you covered.

Even better, an interactive resort map makes navigating The Datai Langkawi a breeze, while real time notifications announcing the arrival of dolphins in the bay, Dusky Langurs at The Beach Club, or Great Hornbills at The Pavilion, bring the island's extraordinary natural world to life.

"Don't miss a thing while at the resort with The Datai Langkawi's new app," says Arnaud Girodon, General Manager. "With pop-up messages of dolphin and otter sightings, details on specially curated dinners, and updates on workshops with talented artists, everything you wanted to know about this magical paradise is now available at your fingertips."



©William Watt

TRADITIONAL COUTURE

Talented jewellery designer **Ash Majid** has championed the use of traditional Malay patterns in her contemporary Masterpiece collections, pieces from which can be found at The Boutique.



Ash wears
her Grand
Batiq Choker

left-right:
The Grand Batiq Choker;
Songket Chokers

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A JEWELLERY DESIGNER?

Being different is what first started my venture into jewellery making. I've always tried to look my best, even if I'm just going to the market; I once read a quote that said, "Always look good, you never know who you are going to bump into". Who knows, one day I might bump into Victoria Beckham! I've always loved to reassemble and experiment with accessories; I started to play around with a simple necklace to see if I could transform it into a statement piece and by doing so I can ensure I will always look different from everyone out there.

WHAT ASPECTS OF MALAYSIAN CULTURE WILL WE FIND IN YOUR PIECES?

You can see traditional Batik and Songket prints incorporated into *dokoh* (three-layer traditional kebaya brooch), *kerongsang* (common brooch) and *pending* (traditional metal belt buckle) pieces. Dokoh and kerongsang (common brooch) pieces are widely used in Malaysia as they are the usual accessories for women wearing a kebaya (a traditional Indonesian and Malaysian blouse-dress). However, what I did is to transform these plain items into something that I'm sure will turn a few heads, the Batiq & Songket Choker, a statement Masterpiece that has that traditionally Malaysian feel, but with an added twist.

YOUR COMPANY HAS THE MANTRA "ONE DESIGN, ONE OWNER". WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR CUSTOMERS LOOKING TO COMMISSION A PIECE?

People love to own things. What better way than to own your own design, a design that belongs to you and a beautiful piece of jewellery that was handmade just for you. The sense of full ownership of each Masterpiece is what makes our clients come back and customise more from us.



WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A CHOKER AS YOUR SIGNATURE PIECE?

I have always loved necklaces and chokers; they are worn right at the spot that catches the eye and the possibilities are endless. If you can think creatively, you can do so much more with necklace/choker accessories. As people can see from my line of products, I have something simple like the Mini Batiq Choker range, through to full-on Grand Batiq or Songket Chokers. If you want the whole room to look at you, I'd suggest you commission your own take on our Grand Batiq/Songket Choker and get ready to be noticed.

WHAT COLOURS AND PATTERNS INSPIRE YOU WHEN DESIGNING NEW PIECES?

I will work with any pattern and colour, actually; all have their own unique elements. If the pattern and colour suit the concept design, I will go for it. Creating a Batiq/Songket Choker is a very intricate process. It takes a lot of trial and error before we go for production. You need to understand the Batik and Songket designs, their flow and their many elements, and talk to the patterns if you must. You need to connect to the material. With chokers, everything needs to be in the right place so the process of choosing the right Batik and Songket patterns is the most important aspect in the creation of each Masterpiece.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO BEING A MALAYSIAN JEWELLERY DESIGNER AND HOW HAS THE NATIONAL SCENE DEVELOPED?

I would say awareness. I want people in Malaysia to wear Batik on a daily basis and not just during a formal event. Batik and Songket are very special materials in our region. You can't get them anywhere else in the world, so we need to embrace them and wear them with pride. Being a pioneer in Batik and Songket accessory design in Malaysia, I would like my Masterpieces to be recognised as part of our handmade heritage. For now, when people look at Batik, it's either a Batik shirt or a Batik dress or skirt. How about Batik accessories?

WHAT NEW COLLECTIONS AND PIECES ARE YOU PRESENTLY WORKING ON AND WHAT HAS BEEN THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THEM?

Currently, I'm in the process of trying out custom-made Batik canting design. Canting is a pen-like tool used to apply liquid hot wax in the batik-making process. I work very closely with the Batik canting artist, as we need to understand each other's needs. Due to my specific requests, I need to monitor the progress on a daily basis. For this particular design, I'm going more with Malaysian floral motifs. With this new collection coming out soon, my clients can expect detailed custom-made Batik canting designs and of course fine finishing on their Batiq Choker. ■



from left to right:
The Iban are one of Borneo's largest minorities; the traditional longhouses of the Iban inspired The Datai Langkawi's Canopy Collection.

CHILDREN OF THE FOREST

Once fearsome headhunters chased deep into the rainforest by rival tribes, the Iban people of Sarawak have used tourism to help bolster and preserve their timeless way of life.

When we think of the tribal cultures of Malaysian Borneo, the Iban are typically the first to come to mind. Famed for their rich culture and heritage, their vibrant traditional dress, their elegant dances and storytelling, and their deadly efficiency as warriors, the Iban remain one of the most important tribal groups in Sarawak and continue to live deep within the rainforest, unperturbed by the onslaught of modernity.

A branch of the Dayak people of Borneo, the Iban trace their origins to the mouth of the Kapuas River, Asia's longest body of flowing water. It was up this meandering waterway that they travelled as they escaped tribal conflict and colonisation, with many tribal groups eventually settling in the Sri Aman river basin, near today's border with Indonesia. Today, the Iban can be found in Indonesia's





West Kalimantan, Brunei, and Sarawak, and while they're no longer headhunters, they still maintain a traditional lifestyle that's in harmony with the ebb and flow of nature.

One of the aspects of the Iban culture that has been most closely preserved is its language. A Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family, Jaku Iban has many similarities to Malay (especially Sarawakian Malay) and traces its roots to western Borneo, where Malayic languages are thought to have originated. The preservation of Jaku Iban has been accomplished in part thanks to its recognition by the Malaysian public school system, which includes the language in exams for Form 3 and 5 level students in Sarawak, maintaining classical Iban as a language for future generations.

Iban culture has also been preserved through the tribe's many religious festivals and through living in traditional longhouses, a timeless communal lifestyle that reaches back centuries. Both of these aspects of time-honoured Iban culture have made Iban villages popular with intrepid travellers looking to experience this unique way of life.

Iban festivals are centred on gawai, or

propitiating the tribe's many gods, who can be grouped into seven categories related to farming, warfare, fortune, health, and death. Although 76% of Iban now consider themselves to be Christian, many still follow the tribe's ancient animist rituals and Ibans of both faiths come together to honour the old gods and traditions at the end of the rice harvest, when produce is abundant. The Gawai Dayak festival, which takes place annually in early June, pays homage to the Lord Sempulang Gana, among other gods, and is a chance for extended families to gather, feast, give thanks, and plan resolutions, commitments, or challenges in a process called 'bejalai'.

These tasks can run the gamut from trivial to intense, as was experienced by Malaysian-British actor Henry Golding, best known for his role as Nicholas Young in the film 'Crazy Rich Asians'. Golding's mother is Iban, and the young actor chronicled his own bejalai in a Discovery Channel Asia documentary titled 'Surviving Borneo' in which he endeavours to survive the dense rainforests of Sarawak as part of a ritualistic passage to manhood and an offering to the gods before his wedding day.



clockwise from left:
The Iban are known for their festivals, many of which centre around the rice harvest; the Iban live collectively in longhouses; the community is known for its vibrant traditional dress.

Despite different religious beliefs, Iban still live, farm and harvest together, and with Gawai so fundamental to the fabric of Iban identity, the on-going preservation of Iban culture retains many of the old ways and the old gods, for generations to come.

In fact, it is the communality of the longhouse that has allowed the Iban to overcome so many challenges. Life centres around the longhouse, long, wooden dwellings perched on stilts, with rooms set aside for families and large communal areas for cooking and gathering. As the tribe grows in size, so does the long house, hence its name. It's here, as communities and families come together after a long day farming or foraging in the forest, that folklore is passed down through oral traditions, songs accompanied by percussion instruments made from forest materials, and poetry, often around the cooking fires.

Many Iban dishes are cooked in cylindrical sections of bamboo called ruas, which offer great insulation as well as a distinctive bamboo flavour to the rice, vegetables, or kasam, meat that has been preserved with salt roots and nuts. Meals are often accompanied with 'tuak', a traditional wine made from cooked glutinous rice, home-made yeast and herbs, that only adds to the pageantry of the storytelling.

In many ways, the rise in tourism in Sarawak, and the increased interest in traditional longhouse homestays and Iban interaction has helped the tribe retain its rich culture and instill a passion for it in the younger generation while so many other ethnic minorities are in cultural decline. Tourism has provided jobs as Malaysians and foreigners alike travel to Sarawak to visit Iban settlements (some for the annual Rainforest World Music Festival which takes place in Kuching, Sarawak's largest city, each July) and offers young Iban the chance to stay in their community or to return after higher education to build businesses that are linked to their cultural identity.

Many of the artists who have taken up past residencies at The Atelier at The Datai Langkawi are just such success cases and have helped transport Iban culture from the depths of the rainforest to travellers from around the world. ■



THE TALE OF TANDOORI

Famed for the fiery red hue of its meat, tandoori is a timeless cooking method with a rich heritage that traces its way down Asia's ancient Silk Road.



Tandoori is one of the most exported Indian cooking styles

Whether you're a fan of Indian cuisine or not, you're likely to recognise tandoori cooking, if not from the tantalising aromas that emerge from the traditional ovens used for this wholesome cooking style, then from the colour, with strips of succulent skewered meat glowing bright red as if each cut has taken the oven's secret with it.

One of the most exported aspects of Indian cuisine and introduced to Malaysia by communities from Tamil Nadu in southern India, tandoori cookery is centred around the simplistic but effective tandoor, which is a cylindrical clay oven that burns charcoal and is typically sunken into the ground for better insulation. While we most commonly associate tandoori cooking with India (and Indian restaurants), the oven actually has its origins in Persia, and is still commonly used across Central Asia, where marinated meat is cooked on long skewers, the terrific heat of the tandoor infusing the spices and yoghurt into the meat or vegetables.

What gives the meat that striking red hue? Meat prepared for the tandoor – larger pieces are called tandoori and smaller pieces are tikka – is marinated with yogurt and spices, including a tandoori masala, a spice blend that varies from region to region but which typically includes garlic, ginger, onion, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, turmeric, fennel, black pepper, coriander and chilli powder, hence the colour.

The marinated meat is cooked within the oven on long metal skewers, with the charcoal lending a delightful smokiness and the intense heat quickly crisping the outer layer, leaving the inner meat juicy. Tandoori is served dry with lime wedges, pickled vegetables as well as mint chutney to cool the chilli and fluffy naan bread on the side.

The Gulai House at The Datai Langkawi has a dedicated brass tandoor oven and tandoori chef (*read more about Chef Ari on page 30*) with dishes on offer including Ayam Tikka, boneless chicken marinated in tandoori masala; Tandoori Kambing, skewered Australian lamb; and Udang Raja, succulent tiger prawns with masala and yoghurt. ■



LOCAL LIBATIONS

Using the first batches of The Datai Langkawi's very own craft vodka and gin, the resort's mixologists have crafted a series of intriguing new libations. Here are some of our favourites.

Water Lily is one of the new vodka-based cocktails at the resort.

For a resort that takes sustainability and conservation so seriously, it makes sense to produce a house vodka that maintains the same fundamentals. Following the successful launch of The Datai Langkawi's craft gin, the mixology team has worked with a local distiller to create a smooth, pure and elegant vodka that follows timeless Italian distilling traditions. The vodka will act as a base to an exciting new range of cocktails by Beverage Manager Zul that showcase Malaysian and Asian ingredients.

Water Lily is just such a concoction. Made with The Datai Vodka, Campari, orange liqueur, grapefruit juice, lemon juice, rosemary and pegaga leaf, this elegant yet modern take on a classic Italian aperitivo throws the limelight on a local superfood that's been flying under the radar for too long. Used in traditional Malay medicine for centuries, pegaga (also known as gotu kola) is an adaptogenic herb known to boost brain function and speed up the healing process. It lends a freshness to the natural bittersweet notes of the cocktail.

Combining both The Datai Vodka and The Datai Gin, the Sirih is a deceptively simple cocktail that captures the earthy flavours of sirih or betel leaf, another vital ingredient in traditional Malay medicine and one that's said to aid digestion. The leaf can be chewed raw, cooked, or used to wrap tobacco. Shaken with a touch of Angostura bitters for balance and plenty of ice, the betel nut adds a herbaceous flavour to this dry martini rendition - opt to have yours with a pinch of kapur (cooking chalk) on the betel leaf garnish in the way locals have enjoyed their leaves for generations.

For a Tom Collins-style drink that will keep the heat at bay, the Ambarella Fizz combines The Datai Gin with fresh lime juice, sugar syrup, white asam boi (sour plum), soda and the juice of a kedondong, another Malaysian superfood that's known to be packed with vitamin C. Malaysians favour eating the kedondong fruit with a little salt, thick soya sauce, and even chilli, but it's also a popular ingredient in the classic rojak (spicy fruit salad).

FRUIT OF ANCIENT VINES

Named for the year when vines were first planted in Costers del Segre, 1780 is an intense yet approachable red blend from acclaimed Catalan producer Castell del Remei.

With the distinction of being the oldest winery in Catalonia, Castell del Remei is an icon for lovers of Spanish reds, wines lovingly kissed by intense sunshine and crafted in the timeless Bordeaux tradition. Located in the Costers del Segre, a Spanish Denominació d'Origen Protegida or Denomination of Origin, and led by winemaker and owner Tomàs Cusiné, Castell del Remei makes memorable white and red wines using its own organically-grown grapes and those sourced from a hand-picked collective of plots located higher up in the nearby Pyrenees.

Cusiné is a recognised oenologist and is considered one of the best wine makers in the country. His winery makes the most of its Mediterranean climate, which features a wide temperature variation that includes sudden, often dramatic (by Spanish standards at least)



from left to right:
Castell del Remei's cask hall; a bottle of Castell del Remei 1780.

winters, with their lingering fogs, and long, basking summers with low rainfall.

With a rich, deep red hue and hints of oak that flow from nose to palate to finish, the Castell del Remei 1780 is as bold as those sempiternal Catalan summers. A blend of Cabernet, Tempranillo, Merlot and Garnacha, 1780 is fermented in stainless steel and barrelled at a fortifying 14.5% ABV in new French and American oak for 18 months, forming an assertive yet elegant foundation of flavours. Rounded and sophisticated but not without its touches of character, the wine displays great depth with intense cherry, cassis, and blackberry flavours, a lingering smokiness, and accents of balsamic, leather, as well as candied fruit mellowed with minerality.

At The Datai Langkawi, the 2012 vintage is recommended with venison and beef dishes as well as heavier pasta courses.

REDEFINING THE WORLD AROUND US

Showcasing creative talents from across Malaysia, the resident artist series continues at The Atelier, with hands-on workshops, sustainable art, and innovative creations from some of the country's leading artisans.



REBECCA YAU

An artistic force bound for The Atelier is Rebecca Yau, who has been in the creative field for as long as she can remember. A classically trained pianist, and working professionally as a creative director, Rebecca still finds time to indulge her passion for creativity in the world of arts and craft, and loves to use both upcycled and recycled materials in her pieces.

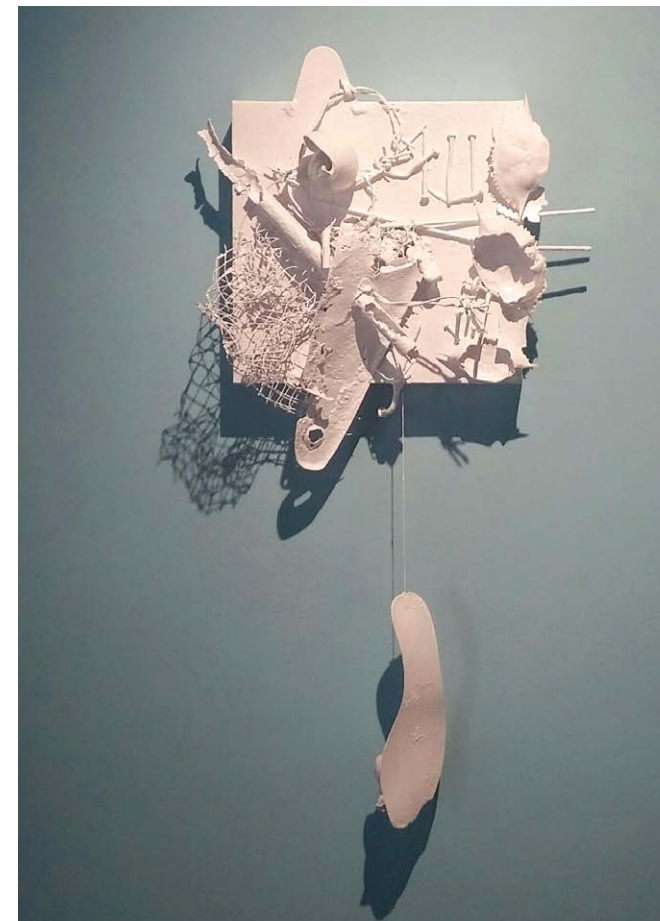
BÖHÖ By Bujbecs is a brand Rebecca has maintained for the past six years; retailing vintage, antique, rare and handmade items, it is a local force for the promotion of repurposing and reusing, while reducing carbon output. The BÖHÖ Upcycle Series is a campaign Rebecca launched in 2020, catering to children and adults alike and encouraging them to discover fun and creative ways to recycle and upcycle. During her time at The Datai Langkawi, Rebecca will be conducting four workshops that will teach guests how to make bangles, necklaces, beaded plastic curtains, and plastic dream catchers, all of which are available through the BÖHÖ By Bujbecs online store.



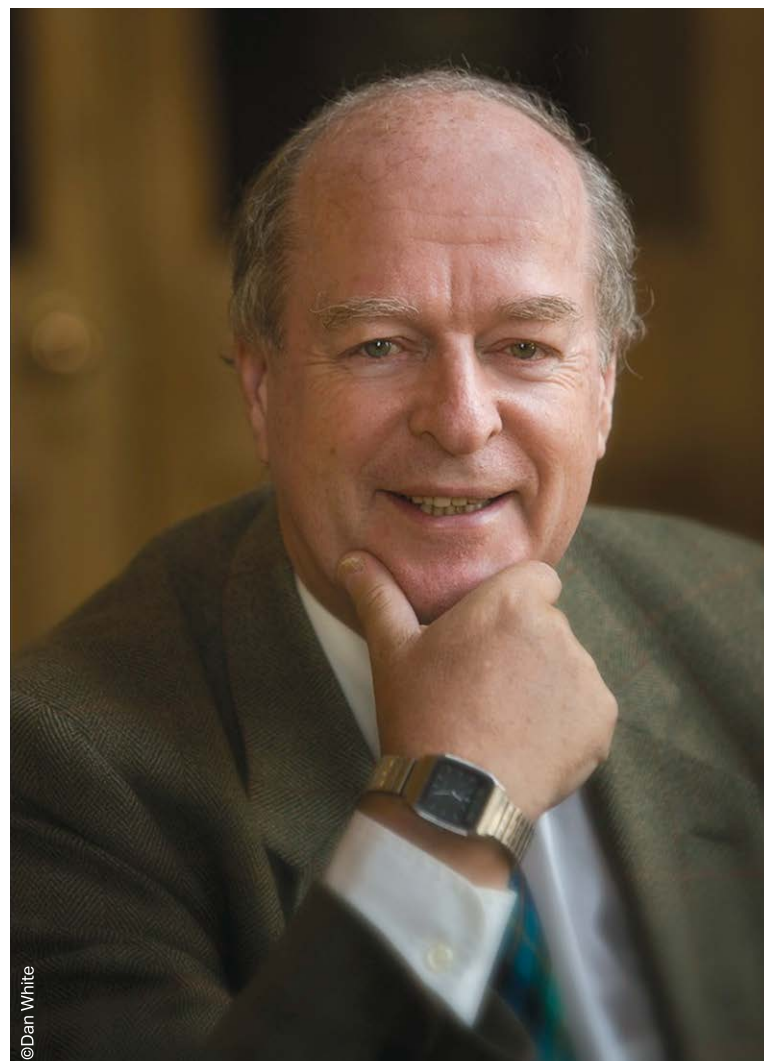
SUHAIMI FADZIR

Calling both Langkawi and Kuala Lumpur home and also spending time each year in St Louis in the United States, Suhaimi is an acclaimed Malaysian sculptor known for his unique award-winning "archipainting", which blends fine art with structural intricacies and architectural principles. Collected by art lovers from around the world, Suhaimi's fascinating pieces have been exhibited in Tokyo, Venice, Miami, Kuala Lumpur, and Dublin, where he won the Dublin Biennial Award of Excellence in 2012.

Suhaimi's unique approach to mixed media art marries history, personal experience, the environment, and collective memory. He weaves these independent threads into a non-linear story where distinctions between present, past, fiction, imagination, and reality are nullified. Pieces include a diverse range of textures, found objects and personal mementos that the artist picks up on his travels. By doing so, he creates pieces that resist easy interpretation and instead suggest alternative perspectives, often influenced by materialism, industrialism and kitschery.



clockwise from top left: Rebecca Yau; Suhaimi Fadzir; the artist's works have been exhibited around the world; Suhaimi's 2020 piece Mengenal Bohor Merah; pieces from BÖHÖ By Bujbecs.



©Den White

PERSISTENCE LEADS TO PARADISE

Author **Richard Lyon** recounts his first visit to The Datai Langkawi, a Southeast Asian foray upon the completion of a book about his fighter pilot uncle.

Close to a 24-hour and near 7,000-mile door-to-door journey brought us to The Datai Langkawi, which had been highly recommended to my wife Anne by friends Christopher and Shirley, who had made February visits for some 20 years.

Our travel plans had originally included nine nights at The Datai Langkawi followed by a visit to our daughter Vicky and family in Hong Kong before returning to the United Kingdom. The Hong Kong element fell by the wayside as the pandemic cast its shadow over China. No travel restrictions were yet announced for Malaysia, so we extended our stay at the resort by two nights before returning home.

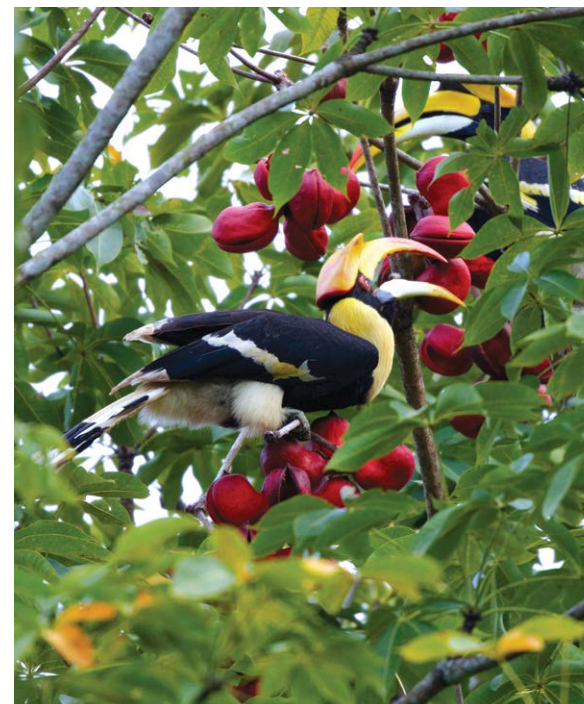
Until Anne's retirement a couple of years ago, we had not been able to easily get away for such a treat during term time, but at the end of February we found ourselves checking in mid-evening and looking forward to the next 10 days in the balmy atmosphere under the caring eyes of the ever-smiling Datai staff.

The next morning, we just made it for the end of breakfast and were able to see the hotel in daylight for the first time. Immediately, we were watching out for the wildlife, and soon spotted a Great Hornbill. There is nothing quite so languorous to observe from your breakfast table than the 1.3-metre wingspan glide path of one of the resident pair of Great Hornbills, setting the mood for the day ahead.

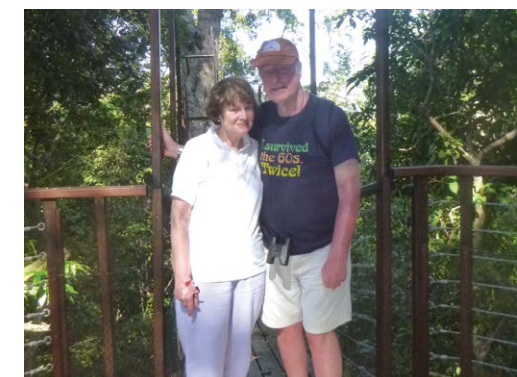
Then it was downhill, or rather down the steps of the Grand Staircase, for some chilling out on the beach. After getting our bearings at The Beach Club and absorbing the beauty of one of the top ten beaches in the world, visits to The Nature Centre and The Health Club beckoned and we booked ourselves on some enticing nature walks and gym sessions.

Located at the centre of a semicircular mile-wide bay, the crescent of the silky sanded Datai Beach, with its panorama from west to east, was perfect. The lush rainforest gives topographical protection from the south whilst, to the north, the curve of the beach wraps and encloses the visitor within its arms. The island of Pulau Anak Datai in the near foreground, to the north-east, and the more distant archipelago of the Tarutao National Park provide a more distant spatial edge.

Ten days in this "land of one's wishes" paradise, and taking our pick for company from the diverse



©Eric Martin



clockwise from left:
The author; a Great Hornbill; Richard and his wife Anne at The Datai Langkawi; Richard's book can be found in The Library; a Dusky Langur monkey.

list of more longer-term inhabitants than the human visitors, we watched shy Sunda Colugos, Scarlet-backed Flower Peckers, Dusky Langurs and Macaque monkeys, Oriental-pied Hornbills and Great Hornbills, White-bellied Sea Eagles, including a chick being fed on the nest; geckos, pythons, kingfishers, flying squirrels, bats, and the birds after whom the island of Langkawi is named, Brahminy Kites. On the Butterfly Walk we spotted between 20 and 30 of the 535 native butterfly species of Langkawi and watched a troop of 15 Dusky Langur monkeys swinging through the trees as they crossed the river, father leading, followed by lots of young and, towards the end, two orange-furred babies clinging to the underbellies of their mothers.

Each day the weather was ideal. Glorious sunshine with perfect temperatures, good shade, and a cooling breeze combined to make for easy relaxation. Lunch at The Beach Club and in the evening, choices of the finest of dining from Malaysian, Thai or

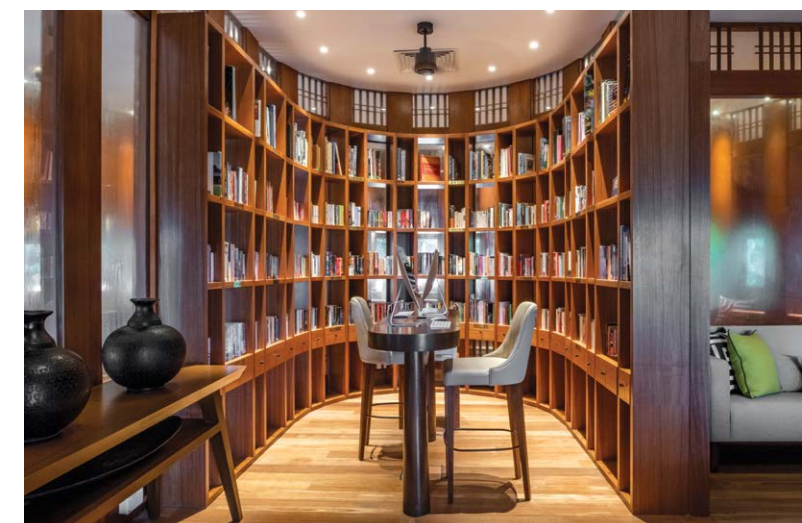
East/West cuisine added to the relaxed atmosphere in this rainforest paradise.

In contrast, just six months previously, I was in the final stages of publishing my first book, with copy-editing and punctuation checking raising the blood pressure. This book tells the story of my uncle, Flying Officer Russell Lyon. A Scottish WWII Spitfire pilot with RAF 234 Squadron, he was missing in action in late July 1944, and the book details the 2003-2015 odyssey of identifying his war grave in southern Brittany.

In 2019, my book on the subject, *Finding the 'Ring of Truth'*, was published.

A visit to The Datai Langkawi's library prompted me to offer a copy of this book, where it may sit alongside the works of familiar and more prolific authors.

I am grateful to The Datai Langkawi for giving me this opportunity to share my uncle's story with this wider readership and look forward to returning there again. ■





The Nature Centre tea corner, with specially curated teas by Dr. Ghani

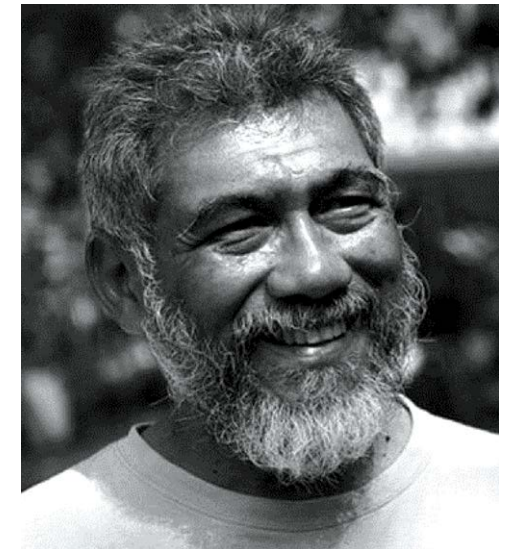
A MIND FOR HEALING

Irshad Mobarak, Head Naturalist at The Datai Langkawi, remembers with fondness the contributions made by the late **Dr. Abdul Ghani** to promote traditional Malay wellness.

When I was first approached to write this tribute to the late Dr. Ghani, I realised that no matter how I wrote it, it would never do justice to this extraordinary giant of a man. Dr. Ghani had touched the lives of so many people on the island.

Dr. Ghani was a native of the island and came from a long lineage of traditional healers. As a young student he received his doctorate in Cairo, Egypt, and when he returned to Langkawi, he became the first doctor to have a private medical clinic, where he practised in the late 1980s and early 1990s. When The Datai Langkawi opened, he soon became the hotel's staff and guest physician. I always remember him as being very professional but at the same time approachable and friendly. The welfare of his patients was always his prime consideration, and this would, at times, put him at odds with Mr. Jamie Case, who was the first General Manager of The Datai Langkawi. Dr. Ghani told me: "Once, Jamie queried me about giving out medical leave to the hotel's staff too easily, so I chastised him, arguing that the staff were overworked and stressed out and needed the time off to de-stress, recover and to return reinvigorated, so to be able to give their 110 per cent best in their respective jobs". From that point on, Jamie never brought the matter up again.

Dr. Ghani had also told me that when he first came to practise on the island, he had been eager to promote the superiority of modern medicine over traditional medicine to the islanders. In the early years, he admitted that he had very few patients, not because people did not trust modern medicine but because people were not getting sick. Most patients only died from old age rather than some sickness. He told me: "People on the island were living healthy and productive lives late into their 80s and 90s, and even a few into their early 100s! Many of the medicines in my clinics would expire on the



shelves." A few short years later, Dr. Ghani chose to close his three clinics on the island and devote the rest of his life to the study and promotion of traditional Malay medicine.

About two-and-a-half years ago, when the resort was closed for its major renovation, our paths crossed again. The Datai Langkawi was keen to develop an indigenous Malay wellness programme and, naturally, Dr. Ghani was approached for consultation. Through his expert advice, training and nurturing, we now have an award-winning traditional wellness activity to offer to our guests, one that is unique and a first among hotels in Malaysia.

Here at The Datai Langkawi, you can start your day with an early morning walk on a forest trail called *Mandi Embun*, followed by a swim in the cool, crystal clear waters of a jungle stream called *Mandi Maul Hayat*, which literally translates as 'bathing in the fountain of youth'. Dr. Ghani also created three wellness teas that you can enjoy at the tea corner at The Nature Centre: Elixir Of Youth, Taste Of Desire and Nanong's Thirst Quencher.

Thank you, Dr. Ghani, for sharing your knowledge. May your legacy live on. ■



YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND

Former royal butler and founder of Aspire Globally, **Wayne Fitzharris**, reflects on the evolution of the butler's role, changing guest expectations, and his recent return to The Datai Langkawi to train the butler team.

WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AND TO BUTLERING SPECIFICALLY?

I always wanted to be a chef; my Irish grandmother was an amazing cook and she worked in private service. I fondly remember enjoying all the amazing food she would cook, which inspired me to follow in her footsteps. I remember how proud she was when I became a chef, working in some of the most amazing London hotels where my passion for hospitality began. When I left the kitchen, I moved into service delivery and quickly became a young manager and at the age of 26, I was appointed to manage the Royal Palace of Jordan. Since then my team and I have looked after an array of VIPs and royalty, including members of the British royal family, the Crown Prince and now Emperor of Japan, President Clinton, Yasser Arafat, Elizabeth Taylor, and state leaders from across the Middle East.

HOW HAVE THE PERCEPTION OF BUTLERS AND THE EXPERIENCE THEY OFFER GUESTS CHANGED DURING YOUR CAREER?

Service has always been an evolutionary process where improvements must be constant. Just as expectations change as we age, service needs to evolve according to changing times. Personalised service should always be timeless as connoisseurs of luxury enjoy services based upon empathy and intuitiveness, requiring an understanding of how luxury should be enjoyed and delivered. Once luxury hotels emerged, the butler was reborn as the ultimate guarantor of luxury service by ensuring the very highest expectations were understood and delivered.

WE GENERALLY CONSIDER BUTLERS TO BE A VERY ENGLISH TRADITION; IS THAT SOMETHING THAT'S CHANGING?

When the Normans invaded England in 1066, they brought the old French word *botellier*, which was the name given to the most trusted employee who took care of the wines and expensive bottles. The Anglo-Saxon name became butler, meaning bottle manager, someone that managed the employer's personal needs; his home, his staffing and his entertaining. Over the last 1,000 years, the British butler reputation has been achieved by generations of butlers passing down their standards from one generation to the next, and the word 'butler' has become synonymous with service delivered at the highest standards.

It is difficult to generalise and we must be careful not to label everyone as the same but in my experience butlers from Europe are sometimes a little stiff and lack sincerity. Service can be a little distant and can lack friendliness or warmth. In Asia, service comes from the heart, it's a cultural thing, and you can feel that service is more genuine. After several years of decline, there is now a rekindled interest in the traditions and history of the butler profession.



clockwise from other page:
Wayne Fitzharris, butler trainer and founder of Aspire Globally; Wayne during his training at The Datai Langkawi; the Aspire Globally training team organising an event for heads of state.

TELL US ABOUT THE TRAINING PROCESS YOU OFFER; HOW DID THE TEAM MEMBERS AT THE DATAI LANGKAWI MATCH UP WITH THE PRECISION AND INTUITIVENESS REQUIRED?

Our training is tailored to The Datai Langkawi's vision and our courses are written to deliver a wide variety of permutations. Every component concentrates on luxury expectations across a wide curriculum, including building self-confidence, self-awareness, luxury communication, body language, and cultural bridging. We concentrate on butler skills, role play, and place a big value on allowing personality to shine through. Luxury lives in the perception of unique differences and tiny details, and The Datai Langkawi team embraced the training and the many challenges we gave them.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE BUTLER PLAY AT THE DATAI LANGKAWI?

No guest is ever the same and professional butlers tune in intelligently to gauge the levels of service a person might enjoy and adjust themselves appropriately. The butler's purpose is to create unique opportunities for happiness by never offering moments of unhappiness. Their role is to become a memory creator, by helping the hotel team understand every unique guest preference and ensuring every service is magically delivered. ■



TWIN INSPIRATION

At The Gulai House, chefs Adee and Ari tap into their extensive cooking experience to deliver fascinating dishes and an authentic Malaysian culinary experience.

from left:
Chef Ari at The Gulai House; the chef preparing meat for the Tandoor oven.

CHEF ARI

DO YOU COME FROM A FAMILY THAT LIKES TO COOK?

Yes, I do come from a family who loves cooking and consider this passion at the root of what I am today.

HOW DID YOU FIRST DEVELOP YOUR COOKING CAREER AND WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE DATAI LANGKAWI?

I was practically raised in the kitchen, so it was a natural evolution to apply to college to study restaurant cookery. I had the heritage and the motivation, and was thirsty to learn more about the different spices and techniques. One of the great things about working at a restaurant like The Gulai House is that your education is never ending – you are always learning new things.

AT THE GULAI HOUSE YOU OVERSEE THE TANDOOR OVEN. WHAT MAKES THESE TRADITIONAL OVENS SO UNIQUE?

Tandoori cooking involves marinating meat and cooking it over an intense fire inside a tandoor oven. The marinade, together with this super-heated technique, are what define tandoori cooking, setting it apart from other cooking styles around the world. It's been a traditional way of cooking for over 5,000 years and remains just as popular around the world (*read more about Tandoori cooking on page 16*).

WHAT OTHER INDIAN DISHES SHOULD GUESTS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR WHEN THEY VISIT?

Chicken or mutton varuval, cooked with various spices, is always popular. The spices, some of which will be new to guests, enhance the flavours of the meat and create balance and harmony in the dish. Guests love dishes like these, because they represent an authentic culinary encounter.

MALAYSIA HAS A LARGE TAMIL POPULATION; HOW HAVE TRADITIONALLY TAMIL DISHES INFLUENCED MALAY AND CHINESE CUISINES?

There are many ways Indian traditional dishes have influenced Chinese and Malaysian cuisine throughout the country. It's mainly about the spices that we use; there are spices and ingredients we have in

common, and those that are unique but it was only a matter of time before an innovative chef decided to mix things up, culminating in something that's truly unique, a harmonious fusion of cultures and flavours, something that's uniquely Malaysian.

TELL US ABOUT THE COOKING SCHOOL AT THE GULAI HOUSE; WHAT WILL GUESTS LEARN AND WHAT DISHES WILL THEY COOK?

During the cooking lessons guests learn to cook two dishes, Chicken 65, which is a classic Southern Indian dish of spicy fried chicken, and Methi Fish Curry, a Methi Machi-style Curry made with fenugreek seeds and Kasuri Methi. These are both accessible recipes that are easy for guests to grasp quickly but also reflect the diversity of Malaysian culinary heritage and showcase many of the key ingredients and spices used here.

WHEN IT'S YOUR DAY OFF WHAT MALAYSIAN DISHES DO YOU SEEK OUT?

Nothing beats a simple *nasi lemak*: fluffy grains of rice cooked in *santan* (coconut milk); the fresh fragrance of pandan leaves; fried *ikan bilis* (dried white anchovies) and peanuts; spicy sambal; slices of cool cucumber, and half a hardboiled egg. *Nasi lemak* is a symbol of unity, as all Malaysians delight in this dish in equal measure.





CHEF ADEE

DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE A CHEF?

Honestly, my ambition was never to become a chef. I always thought that I would work with the government or open my own business. However, one day, when I was 17 years old, I took my first part-time job at a small hotel and the experience quickly influenced me to want to cook and to open my own restaurant or café one day.

WHAT MAKES THE GULAI HOUSE UNIQUE AS A MALAYSIAN RESTAURANT?

I think the design of the restaurant is a major component as it is built like a traditional Malay house, surrounded by the towering trees of the jungle, which creates an unforgettable setting for guests to explore Malay cuisine. Of course, the food also sets The Gulai House apart because of its freshness, its diversity, and its homestyle authenticity.

MALAYSIAN CUISINE IS ENJOYED AROUND THE WORLD; WHAT MAKES THE DISHES AT THE GULAI HOUSE SO AUTHENTIC?

Our focus with every dish is to deliver the most traditional and 'real' Malay dining experience possible, and this means using original recipes for timeless culinary fare. In addition, dishes from all Malaysian states and all the cooking styles of the country are represented in one place, which makes The Gulai House very unique. There is also an emphasis on cooking everything from scratch – just like at home – from the spices we grow and the ingredients we source from local farmers and producers to the pastes we prepare by hand. There's love and attention to tradition in every recipe.

from left:

The Gulai House's authentic Malay dishes include *Ketam Rangup* with bitter leaf, soft shell crab, chili vinegar sauce, and pineapple chutney; at The Gulai House, Chef Adee and his team showcase the best flavours and textures from across Malaysia.

ARE GUESTS FAMILIAR WITH YOUR DISHES WHEN THEY VISIT?

Guests are often familiar with some of our ingredients but because of this focus on authenticity, there's always something that catches their eye and deepens their knowledge. The diversity on offer at The Gulai House ensures that even regular visitors to Malaysia will discover something new and fascinating. What comes as a surprise to guests is how many of the ingredients used in Malay cuisine can also be used in traditional Malay healing.

MANY OF YOUR INGREDIENTS ARE SOURCED FROM THE GARDEN, THE RESORT'S OWN PERMACULTURE PROJECT. AS A CHEF, WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS ARRANGEMENT?

It's great because it means that not only can we source super fresh ingredients, but we can also be part of the process of growing and selecting different vegetables, spices and herbs. Growing our own ingredients also bolsters the confidence of guests, because they know that the chefs have access to the absolute best produce with which to create their dishes.

WHAT'S ONE DISH THAT GUESTS MUST TRY WHEN THEY VISIT THE GULAI HOUSE?

Kerabu Gamat, a salad of sea cucumber with island green herbs, roasted coconut and grated coconut. It's unusual but delicious. ■





The shopfronts of
Jonker Street in
Melaka's Chinatown

MUCH TO DO ABOUT MELAKA

Malaysia's most historic town is also one of the country's
most culturally cosmopolitan, discovers
Simon Richmond.

It's worth risking vertigo to stand on the glass-floored balcony of Melaka's Shore Sky Tower, cantilevered 153m above ground. The panoramic views afforded from the 43rd floor of the Shore complex, across Melaka, are breathtaking and unparalleled.

Let your eye follow the sinuous curves of the Sungai Melaka, the Melaka River, and over the tiled roofs, minarets, and temple towers of Chinatown, to the Strait of Melaka, one of the world's key shipping lanes. The waterway gave birth to this harbour on the southwest coast of peninsular Malaysia over seven centuries ago. Seafaring traders and colonial invaders from China, India, Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom all staked their claims here – each bequeathing diverse cultural ingredients to Melaka's rich melting pot.

When its historic core gained World Heritage status in 2008, UNESCO said Melaka bore 'testimony to a living multicultural heritage and tradition of Asia, where the many religions and cultures met and coexisted.' A stroll along Chinatown's Jalan Tokong offers living proof of this statement: within metres of each other are centuries-old Chinese temples, a mosque, and an Indian temple. No wonder this lane is also called The Street of Harmony.

LEGENDARY BEGINNINGS

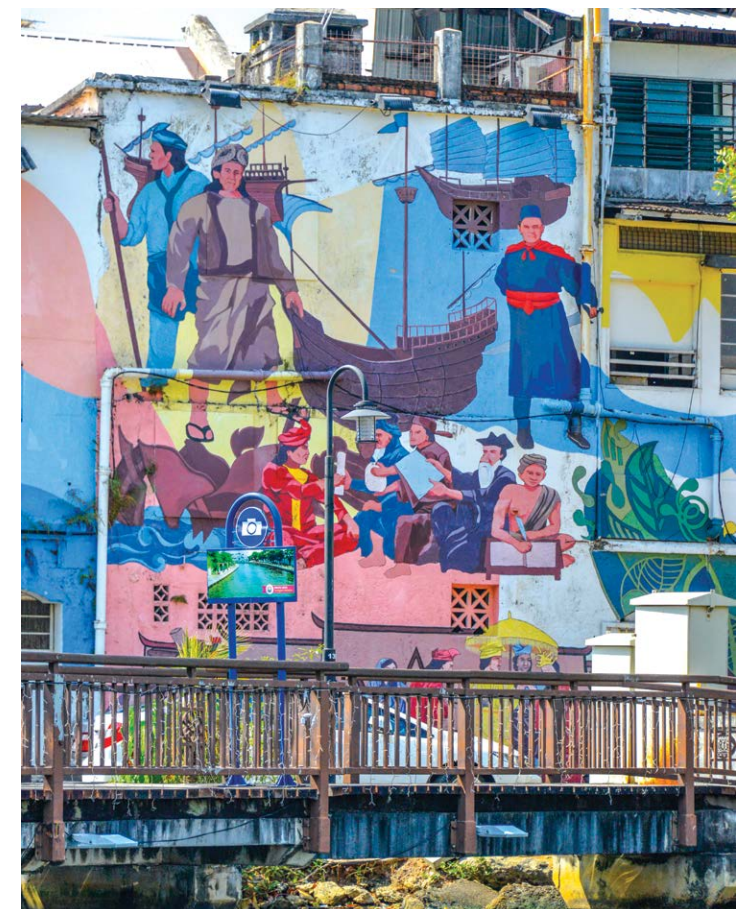
According to the Sejarah Melayu (Malay annals), Melaka was founded in the early 14th century by a Sumatran Hindu called Parameswara. Perhaps of noble birth, more likely a buccaneering pirate, Parameswara and his dynastic line exploited Melaka's fortuitous location to create a bustling, cosmopolitan entrepôt, as well as a system of courtly governance that endured across the Malayan peninsula well into the 19th century.

Parameswara's successors adopted Islam, styling themselves as sultans. Strategic alliances with China brought that country's culture to Malayan shores in the form of Hang



Li Po, who became the fifth wife of Sultan Mansur Shah in the mid 15th century. The Ming dynasty princess is said to have arrived with an entourage of 500 men and women, many of whom intermarried with the locals.

Herein lies the origins of Melaka's Peranakans, also known as Baba-Nyonyas or Straits Chinese. The most successful of these Peranakan families occupied elegant Chinese-Palladian style townhouses like those seen along Chinatown's Heeren Street. For greater insight into Peranakan culture a visit to the Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum is recommended. The museum combines three terrace homes that were occupied by four generations of the Chan family since 1861.



clockwise from top left: The Baba & Nyonya Museum; the historic Stadhuys Buildings of Melaka; street murals show the region's rich cultural heritage; a traditional bridge over the Melaka River.



VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Another, more modest family home that has been turned into a museum is Villa Sentosa, a cornerstone of the Malay village of Kampung Morten. Sandwiched by a u-bend in Sungai Melaka, the kampung is a charming community of traditional wooden stilt homes with painted window shutters and potted flower gardens. A member of the family will show you around Villa Sentosa, pointing out heirlooms, including evocative old photographs, Ming dynasty ceramics and a century-old Quran.

Melaka also has a small contingent of Chetti, offspring of the South Indian traders who intermarried with Malay and Chinese women. Arriving in the 1400s, the Chetti (or

Chitty) have their own enclave, Kampung Chitty, a short walk west of Chinatown, where you'll find the architecturally distinct Sri Poyatha Moorthi Temple, Malaysia's oldest Hindu temple.

COLONIAL REMNANTS

Visitors to Melaka typically start their explorations of the town's heritage zone at Dutch Square. Look beyond the garishly decorated trishaws that congregate here to notice more of the fascinating layers of history that Melaka wears so casually. Against the backdrop of the blood-red painted buildings of the Stadhuys and Christ Church, both dating from the 17th century Dutch colonial

period, is a marble fountain erected in 1904 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and an 1886 clock tower built in honour of the Chinese merchant Tan Beng Swee.

Follow in the footsteps of St Francis Xavier by climbing nearby Bukit St Paul to view the ruined shell of St Paul's. Built during Portuguese rule in 1521, it is the oldest church in Southeast Asia and was where the Spanish missionary's body was brought for burial in 1553. A year later it was exhumed and transferred to Goa in India.

clockwise from far left:

St John's Fort; traditional shoes given a modern edge; Melaka's historic centre.

EAT UP

If all the sightseeing has given you an appetite, then you're in the right place to satisfy your hunger. Melaka's choice of cuisines is superb. As well as Chinese, Indian and Malay recipes, there's Peranakan dishes, such as *nyonya laksa* (noodles in a coconut and lemongrass flavoured broth) and *pai ti* (crispy pastry shells, stuffed with savoury goodies) to savour. Lovers of punchier flavours should sample *curry debel*, a spicy stew that comes from the Kristang cookbook: the result of Portuguese and Dutch intermarrying with Malays, the Kristang are yet another of Melaka's creole people.

And a final tip from savvy locals; skip touristy Jonker Street Market in Chinatown in favour of Kee Ann Food Street in Melaka's Little India. Among the tasty treats available from the stalls here are satay, chicken rice, and *otak-otak* (spicy fish paste grilled in banana leaves). ■





THE PATTERNS OF NATURE

Dutch designer **Lisette Scheers** taps into her love of Malaysia and the biodiversity of The Datai Langkawi in her new collection for the resort.

Words by: Thomas Bird

Kuala Lumpur today is a city dominated by condominiums, office towers and shopping malls, all competing for space in an increasingly crowded skyline. The Malaysian capital, long known as 'Asia's biggest village', is clearly playing catch-up with the likes of Singapore and Saigon.

But Kuala in Malay means 'confluence' and you only need to look out from street level to witness a very different urban realm flowing between the totems of global capitalism. Street-side markets trade in tropical delicacies like jungle fern, lychee, guava and papaya; rows of shophouses vend everything from jewellery to handicrafts to traditional textiles; and kampung neighbourhoods preserve a way of life that is the antithesis of the escalators and fast-food franchises being deployed everywhere else.

It is this fading world of rustic Malay tradition that Dutch designer Lisette Scheers channels into her unique product designs.

"I live in a three-bedroom kampung house in Bangsar, I just can't do condos," Scheers

explains, gesturing to a towering high-rise building, while sipping her morning coffee on a wooden veranda. "I need to feel the grass beneath my feet."

The Malaysian soil is not something new to Scheers. In fact, her roots are here. Born in Singapore, where her father worked for a trading company, the family moved to Malaysia when she was two. Despite stints in Hong Kong and Holland, Scheers would spend most of her formative years in Malaysia until she enrolled at the prestigious Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp in 1988, to study graphic design and illustration.

After graduating, Scheers found employment at a number of notable advertising agencies. However, the idyllic memories of her Southeast Asian upbringing haunted her and when her daughter was born in 2003, Scheers decided to return to the sun-soaked setting of her childhood. "I wanted my daughter to feel what I felt," she explains.

In 2004 her family turned fantasy into reality by returning to Malaysia. It soon grew



apparent, however, that things were changing fast. As the economic tiger roared into the 21st century, Scheers grew increasingly worried by the global homogeneity that was fast supplanting the Malaysia of her memories.

“I decided to create a vintage brand in 2008, something with a distinctive Southeast Asian flavour that I imagined tourists would want to take back home.” But Scheers misread the market. “Actually, what tourists want is something quite cliché, a Buddha on a t-shirt for example.”

In fact, it was the locals that were enthralled by her colourful, hand-drawn designs. “Most of my clients are Malays. They have a passion for preserving heritage. They’re extremely proud of their traditions and don’t want to see them disappear.”

Taking inspiration from everyday Malaysia, anything from “old sarongs to intan jewellery”, it didn’t take long for Nala Designs to get noticed. Beginning with a small shop selling paper prints and notebooks in Bangsar, Scheers now boasts a flagship lifestyle store in Bangsar Village II, a second in George Town, Penang, as well as a presence in Europe, Japan and several other Asian countries. The product range has

rapidly expanded in tandem with the company’s growth to include bags, accessories like bracelets and cardholders, as well as men’s shirts and a whole wardrobe of women’s clothes, of which her 1950s-style dresses are the most iconic.

Scheer’s work schedule is breathless, her output prolific. “Once you approach 50, you start to see there’s a time limit. I work through the night and hand draw everything. But I’m always looking forward to the next project, for something to inspire me.”

The pandemic of 2020 may have slowed business globally but Scheers is as stoical as she is creative. Nala Designs already count among its products a series of signature face masks, and recently held a socially-distanced ‘Warehouse Rock’ event with discounted products available over a three day period.

If that wasn’t enough, Scheers’ latest project is a collaboration between The Datai Langkawi and Nala Designs aimed at producing an exclusive product range inspired by nature.



clockwise from left:
Lisette relaxing at Crystal Creek; dynamic, colourful prints are core to Nala Designs; a face mask designed by Lisette as part of The Datai Pledge programme.

“For me, the flora and fauna of the world’s oldest rainforests is as inspiring as an old Malay garment,” says Scheers, who spent a week at the resort foraging through its jungle-fringed gardens looking for patterns in the exotic plants. “When you live in the tropics, it’s all about colour. Tiger orchids, banana flowers, even delicate leaves can give you enough material to produce an entire product range.”

Nature might be informing the concepts for the products Scheers has been commissioned to decorate – which include everything from cushion covers to sarongs, men’s shirts to crockery – but it’s also the pressing need to give something back to the country she calls home.

“What attracted me was The Datai Pledge,” she says of the sustainable initiative launched by Irshad Mobarak, the resort’s Head Naturalist. So, we’re working on some products that are made with sustainable materials and adorned with beautiful natural patterns.”

It’s this kind of collaboration that seems to illustrate what Scheers does best, looking back in order to tackle the challenges we confront. “It’s all about the past,” she says, with a clear eye on the future.

It’s the express goal of The Datai Pledge to preserve and strengthen the environment, ecosystems, culture, heritage and local community in order to ensure their uniqueness for future generations of visitors and for Malaysians to cherish (*read more about The Datai Pledge on page 46*). To this end, all profits from this Nala Designs-The Datai Pledge collaboration will go to NGOs and social enterprise partners. ■



GOING THE DISTANCE TOGETHER

The Datai Langkawi's new collaboration with local NGO SALAM Langkawi is already reaping significant benefits, discovers **Sharmila Rajah.**



A trailblazing partnership, committed to promoting sustainability, has been born out of The Datai Langkawi's collaboration with Sahabat Alam Langkawi or SALAM Langkawi, a Malaysian non-profit organisation committed to environmental protection. Both the resort and SALAM Langkawi share a similar zeal. Because of its setting and context, The Datai Langkawi has been a strong advocate for the environment, having earned eco-credentials in recognition of its efforts and initiatives. SALAM Langkawi, meanwhile, champions awareness of environmental and conservation issues through education and engagement. It's a convergence that makes perfect sense and one inducted through The Datai Pledge, which endeavours to safeguard and preserve Langkawi's natural ecology and cultural heritage.

HOMEGROWN FORCE

SALAM Langkawi has garnered a reputation on the island as a formidable establishment, fiercely invested in environmental conservation. Founded in 2009 by recently married husband and wife duo Abdul Quayyum Abdul

Nashir and Sayyidah Jahizah Hassim, SALAM Langkawi has set itself the task of spearheading the development of innovative sustainability programmes that benefit the local community, industry players and tourists.

"My husband and his friends started the *kitakitar* ('we recycle') drive back in 2009 by collecting trash and recycling it," recalls Hassim. Driven by the obligation to conserve and to fulfil grander eco-ambitions, the founders officially listed SALAM Langkawi as an NGO (non-governmental organisation) in 2019, endorsing practices and actions central to "cleaning, protecting and preserving natural resources with proper community-based management systems" for a greener Langkawi.

The organisation's mission statement is well-defined – to promote sustainable development, advocate a zero waste lifestyle, develop community projects and support green tourism. However, much of SALAM Langkawi's appeal is in its ability to connect at a grassroots level and to galvanise volunteer action. The results are impressive; to date, the organisation's 50 members, supported by a community of local volunteers, have succeeded in collecting



almost 26,000kg of commercial waste while its team of nine certified divers were recently involved in a successful week-long salvage and clean-up exercise of the wreck of a yacht that recently sank in Telaga Harbour.

CONNECTING THROUGH THE PLEDGE

The Datai Pledge, an ambitious and revolutionary programme, connects The Datai Langkawi with specialists, NGOs and social enterprises as they work together to turn inventive ideas into comprehensive sustainability programmes.

SALAM Langkawi is the resort's partner for *Pure for the Future*, one of four components of The Datai Pledge. The collaboration is designed to get a reaction, provoke discussion and ultimately, initiate change. "We have the same ambition to grow and progress our sustainability initiatives for long-term impact. We have always wanted to support each other," explains Hassim, recognising this as no short-term undertaking.

The collaboration centres around waste management, recycling, and repurposing, and to some measure, influencing the way people see their surroundings.

The Datai Langkawi's Quality Control and Continuous Improvement Manager as well as Head of Sustainability, Remi Giromella, is thrilled about the year-long partnership thus far. "It is running well with a lot of initiatives accomplished and some in the pipeline," says Remi. "It is a testament of our commitment to sustainability."

Together, the NGO and resort have plotted an integrated eco-oriented programme consisting of a series of bespoke projects and workshops. SALAM Langkawi has carried out monthly 'guest experience sharing' sessions and batik workshops that use recycled material, each one a platform to reach out to guests, to engage and to educate. In addition, the organisation has been collecting recyclable commercial waste from the resort; candles and slippers are upcycled and refashioned at the SALAM Langkawi Collection Centre (SLCC), ensuring the waste doesn't end up in landfills. "We've hired three single mothers to help us with this," reveals Gia Hassim, co-founder of SALAM Langkawi, emphasising the organisation's duty towards empowering the local community. The candles and slippers find their way back to The Datai Langkawi – they are sold as The Datai Pledge merchandise while some candles are also reused to illuminate guest rooms and communal spaces.

The implications of almost everything we do weighs heavily on the world's rainforests and other natural habitats. Fortunately, the people and the island of Langkawi are benefitting from the positive and sustainable partnership between The Datai Langkawi and SALAM Langkawi. The island now has two committed forces fighting on nature's side, and there's much to be gained from winning. ■



clockwise from other page:

SALAM Langkawi is involved in many activities, including beach cleaning projects; ocean plastic remains a persistent threat across the region, shown here on a local beach on Langkawi Island; The collaboration with SALAM Langkawi is part of The Datai Pledge's Pure for the Future pillar, which seeks to recycle and reuse waste; ocean plastics come in many forms.

LANGKAWI'S WHITE-BLOODED LADY



Exterior view of the Mahsuri House of the Mahsuri Mausoleum complex

Langkawi's best known mythical tragedy, that of the beautiful Mahsuri, has left a legacy that has lingered on the island for centuries.

When it comes to the story of Mahsuri binti Pandak Mayah – known on Langkawi simply as Mahsuri – the line between truth and myth is often obscured by a good story. Mahsuri was said to have travelled with her father – some recountings have her as a princess, some as the daughter of a lowly farmer - from Phuket to Langkawi, in the early 1800s, in search of a better life. It wasn't long until her natural beauty caught the eye of Wan Darus, a fearless warrior and, if the myth is true, the Prince of Langkawi, and they were married.

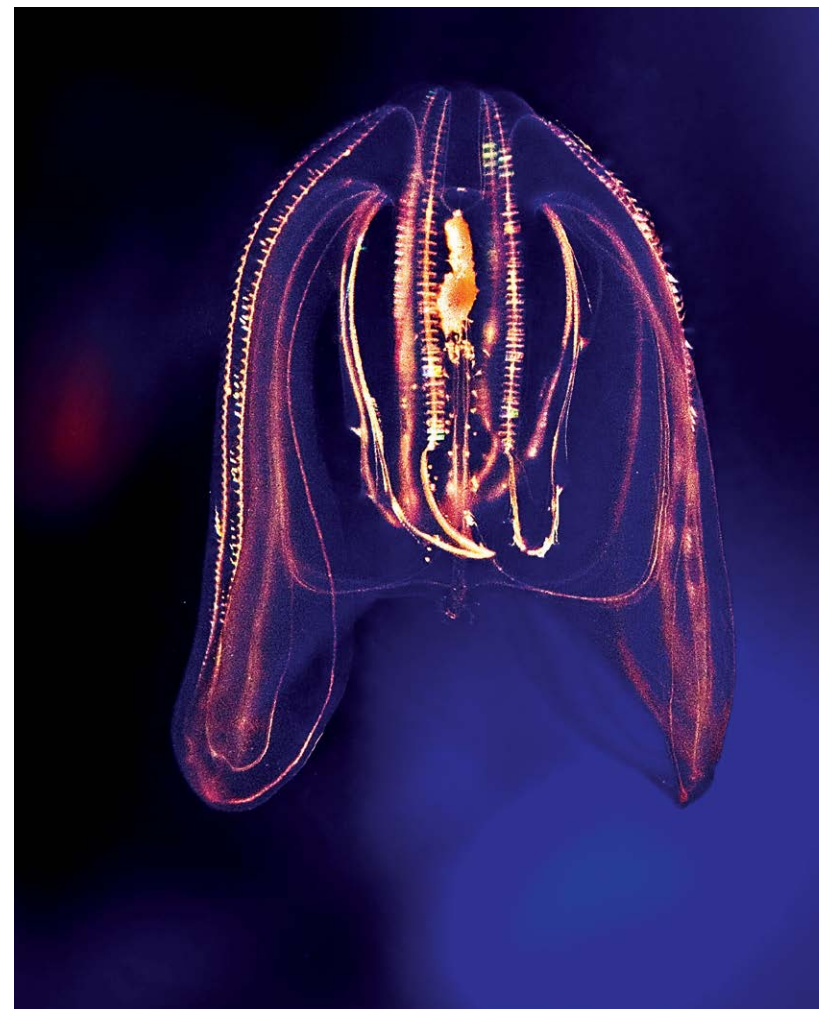
However, when war broke out with the Siamese, Darus was forced to leave his new bride in his home in Padang Matsirat, the ancient capital of Langkawi, where her beauty fuelled the jealousy of the chief's wife, Wan Mahora. When Mahsuri befriended a young traveller named Deraman, Mahora spread rumours that this beautiful foreigner was having an affair; before long Mahora had turned the whole village against Mahsuri, and despite her pleas of innocence, she was sentenced to death.

The villagers, or so the story goes, tied Mahsuri to a tree and stabbed her, but despite their efforts, she didn't die. Finally, Mahsuri told her accusers to use

her family's *keris*, a ceremonial wavy blade, and as they struck her, white blood flowed from the wound in a symbol of her innocence. With her dying breath, Mahsuri is said to have cursed Langkawi for seven generations. Not long after, the Siamese invaded, and the villagers of Padang Matsirat burned their paddy fields as they retreated.

Locals believe the story of Mahsuri to be true, pointing out the decade of crop failure that was said to follow her untimely death. In fact, some facts do back up the story; the last Siamese invasion was in 1821, the field that was burned is still known as *beras terbakar* or burnt rice, and Mahsuri's final resting place remains a solemn monument known as Makam Mahsuri. In fulfillment of the curse, it wasn't until the 20th century, some seven generations later, that Langkawi began to prosper as a tourist destination.

Whether it was based on fact or fiction, the story of Mahsuri resonates with Malaysians and visitors alike; you'll find her likeness in local galleries, groups of tourists are regularly seen reflecting at her tomb and even today her story is passed from generation to generation.



THE JELLIES OF DATAI

The end of the year is a time of change in the Langkawi archipelago, and signals the arrival of the jellies, says **Nicole Lim**, Marine Biologist at The Datai Langkawi.

As our region eases into the warm and dry season, change is afoot. The deciduous forests turn amber and yellow preparing for drier months and, as the sea warms, it encourages the growth of phytoplankton.

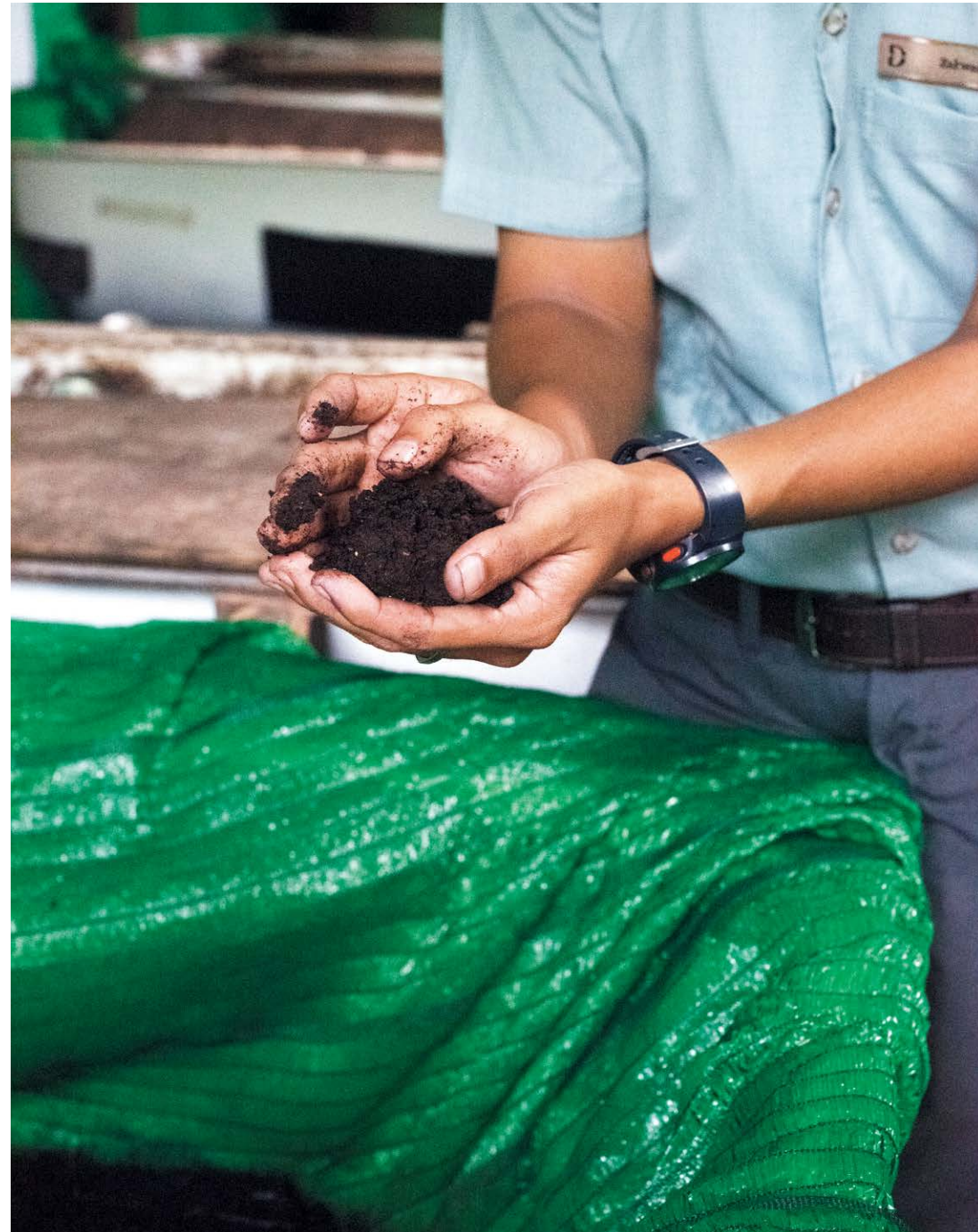
At Datai Bay, plenty of small gelatinous animals wash up on shore, piquing the interest of those strolling the beach. The same gelatinous animals can be seen in the water, appearing in long strings that can drift for hundreds of metres. These animals are salps or 'sea squirts', and with their arrival, other sea jellies are not far behind.

These animals appear similar and are often grouped together as 'jellyfish'. However, they're quite different from each other and belong to different phyla (a level of classification used in taxonomy). Comb jellies belong to the phylum Ctenophora, which includes 100 - 150 species, while sea jellies belong to the phylum Cnidaria, which includes four main classes: Anthozoa (corals, sea anemones and sea pen), Scyphozoa (sea jelly), Cubozoa (box jelly) and Hydrozoa (siphonophores). Most surprisingly, salps are classified in the phylum Chordata and taxonomically are closer to humans than to sea jellies. All three animals can be found in Datai Bay when the seas are warm and abundant with plankton.

Salps are barrel-shaped and almost transparent and move in the water by using jet propulsion. A zooplankton, salps are non-selective filter feeders that trap plankton in their feeding net and have a complex life cycle; a notochord that runs down the back to protect the central nerve cord disappears as they grow into adults and it is this feature that makes them the closest living relative to vertebrates. A solitary salp can form a colony by producing asexually, essentially cloning themselves, and once a chain is formed, some salps will 'switch' to male to continue the reproduction process. Salps are not armed with stinging cells and can be scooped up easily from the water.

Most comb jellies or ctenophores are found in shallow, warm coastal waters and, as biradially symmetrical, they possess eight rows of ciliary comb plates known as ctenes that help in their locomotion. As they move, light is refracted by the cilia, creating a colourful light show. Most comb jellies have a pair of retractable tentacles with sticky cells known as colloblasts that are used to capture prey. They can self-fertilise, cross fertilise or reproduce asexually and lack stinging cells or nematocysts making them safe to handle.

The last group of gelatinous animals found here in Datai Bay are sea jellies, commonly known as jellyfish. They are radially symmetrical and have two body forms, sessile polyps, and swimming medusae, the adult jellies so often seen in oceans. They also reproduce sexually and asexually. Sea jellies have stinging cells or nematocysts; these help them subdue and digest prey but are also the reason why most are not pleasant to bump into in the sea as they can deliver mild to severe stings. It's always best to steer clear of sea jellies, even when they're washed up on the shore as their stingers could still be active.



FORGING A PATH FOR THE FUTURE

One of the key pillars of The Datai Langkawi's Datai Pledge is Pure for the Future, a sustainability initiative focused on cutting pollution, reducing waste, and reusing materials in creative new ways.

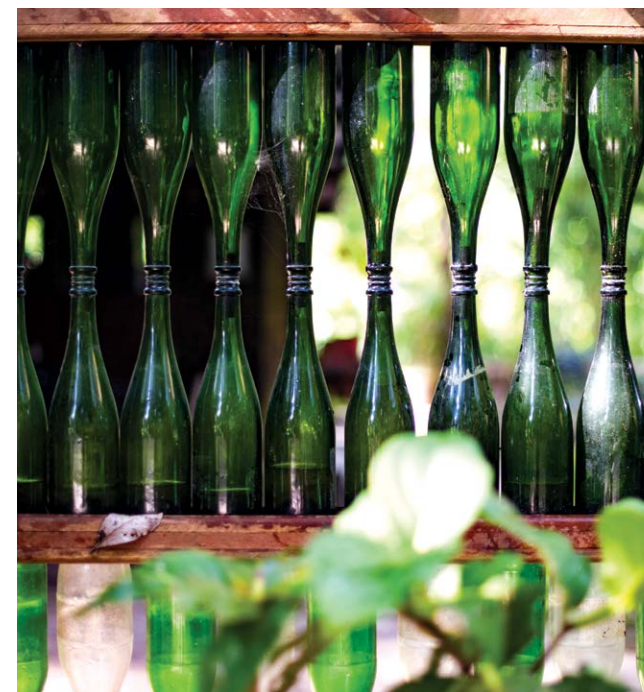
While many resorts are looking at ways to reduce their waste output, few have invested in this goal quite like The Datai Langkawi.

With sustainability at the core of every aspect of the resort, Pure for the Future is one of The Datai Langkawi's most important initiatives. Addressing both, biodiversity loss and climate change, it seeks to incorporate the 7 Rs of sustainability - reduce, recover, recycle, repurpose, replace, return and rethink - into every facet of the property's operation. This means every department, from the rooms division to the food and beverage outlets, is involved in a collective goal of reducing waste destined for landfills and creating intelligent and innovative ways to reuse or recycle these materials.

To date, The Datai Langkawi's efforts have earned the resort the Green Hotel Certification 2019, the Asean Green Hotel Standard Certification, and the coveted EarthCheck ECO (Terrestrial) Certificate, which provides a transparent and scientific assessment of environmental and social sustainability endeavours and opportunities comparative to industry best practice. However, there's still much more the team hopes to achieve.

At the centre of the Pure for the Future project are those 7 Rs of sustainability, vital directives that ensure that as little waste as possible is making its way to already overtaxed landfills. *Reduce* is one of the most important of these elements, as it relates to everything from reducing power and water usage, to reducing waste from the resort. *Recover* takes what waste is created and looks at how it might potentially be used to create energy one day at the resort.

from left:
Planting in The Garden; the resort's permaculture garden is integral to The Datai Pledge programme; candles are recycled as part of the Pure for the Future initiative; glass bottles repurposed.



Recycle, the original sustainable mantra, looks at how the resort's team can create new uses for existing materials, while *Repurpose* examines how all or part of existing materials can be given a second chance. By working with suppliers, the *Return* aspect of the initiative sends used goods, including items like styrofoam containers, back to manufacturers to be recycled or reused, while *Replace* calls for items to be substituted with more sustainable alternatives. This includes the bamboo combs and toothbrushes found in guest rooms.

**from left:**

The resort's bottling plant produces clean, pure drinking water, while generating minimal waste; some upcycled and recycled products are available for purchase in The Boutique.

nutrients to The Garden, while crushed glass, plastics, soap, candles and outdoor slippers are upcycled at The Lab, where they are turned into concrete slabs or are distributed to partner NGOs for recycling and reuse (read more about the efforts of SALAM Langkawi on page 42). Some material is even turned into jewellery by local artisans.

Further reducing water waste, the resort's bottling plant bolsters The Datai Langkawi's policy against single-use plastics by producing pure still drinking water through reverse osmosis, which is then served in specially created glass bottles. In addition to these bottles, guests will notice other elements of the project in their rooms, including biodegradable bathroom amenities and cornstarch shower caps that can be shredded and mulched to be used in hot composting; tea bags and cocoa sachets that can be turned into eco-bricks; and the use of all-natural Akar body care products (read more about the Akar products on page 58).

Sustainability is a battle with many fronts, but the Pure for the Future initiative tackles them all, ensuring that The Datai Langkawi maintains the smallest possible footprint while also encouraging guest and community engagement on challenges that face us all. ■

Above all of these directives is *Rethink*, which inspires the team at The Datai Langkawi to constantly think outside the box, reimagine how things can be done better, and be mindful of how the 7 Rs of sustainability can be applied to life at the resort.

There is no doubt that Pure for the Future is an all-encompassing project, and one that is tackled on several fronts, all of which are connected and collaborative. For example, the Wetland Filtration System developed in 2019 is a waste-water management operation that screens, filters, and purifies water from the resort's sewage treatment plant using natural means. The water from this system is then used to irrigate green spaces, including The Garden, the resort's permaculture project, which grows chemical-free produce for use in the resort's kitchens. Excess water is returned to the environment, clean and untainted.

The Sorting Centre, The Datai Langkawi's efficient recycling centre, contributes food waste to a compost project which in turn feeds



WHERE SUSTAINABILITY MEETS LUXURY

One of the pillars of The Datai Langkawi's The Datai Pledge programme is Pure for the Future, a sustainability initiative focused on cutting pollution, reducing waste, and reusing materials in creative new ways.

PURE FOR THE FUTURE HAS MANY FACETS, FROM REDUCING POLLUTION TO UPCYCLING MATERIALS. WHICH ASPECT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

The most important aspect for me in all our sustainability initiatives comes at the very first stage: awareness. Without the awareness of our associates and outreach to our local community, we would never be able to achieve our pledge of contributing to the protection of our surrounding ecosystem and environment. I am sincerely delighted to see such commitment from all our associates for this noble cause. It is a great step forward for a better sustainable future in Langkawi.

WHERE DID THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS INITIATIVE FIRST COME FROM AND HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE PROJECT DEVELOP?

It all came naturally with our truly passionate and committed team. We embarked on this beautiful journey a few years back, and sustainability was at the core of The Datai Langkawi's refurbishment. Nature experiences were already embedded in The Datai Langkawi vision and we decided to take a significant step forward by putting sustainability at the heart of our operations with a genuine and transparent approach.

The project has developed well with many exciting moments but challenging ones as well, and I'm glad to see such dedication from all our stakeholders. The programme has now reached maturity, where a majority of our initiatives are in place and our goal



Remi Giromella,
Pillar Leader,
The Datai Pledge

of zero waste to the landfill is nearly achieved, with 92 percent of waste processed or recycled.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF SOME OF THE WASTE AT THE RESORT THAT IS NOW BEING REPURPOSED AND UPCYCLED?

Used candles from guest rooms are melted and recycled into new candles at The Lab. We make propolis soap from the propolis collected from our bee farms and glass bottles are crushed and used in concrete slabs. In addition, single-use plastic bags are crushed and heated to make small figurines, while all food waste is macerated and used for composting at our Permaculture Garden.

WHAT KIND OF INFRASTRUCTURE HAS THE RESORT INVESTED IN TO ENSURE IT REDUCES ITS WASTE OUTPUT?

We now have almost everything, from a food compactor, plastic shredder and glass crusher to a woodchipper, plastic injection machine, extrusion machine and a bottling plant.

WHAT'S THE END GOAL OF PURE FOR THE FUTURE?

Sustainability never ends and it requires continuous improvement with plenty of new initiatives. The first goal is zero waste entering landfills by March 2021 and we are very close to achieving this.

GOING TO THE BIRDS

Visit The Datai Langkawi during the months before and after Christmas and you might notice a little more activity in the canopies than usual, says Head Naturalist **Irshad Mobarak**.

If you're enjoying the winter months at The Datai Langkawi, be sure to look up from time to time and you will see plenty of avian guests. This is due to the arrival of migratory birds that visit Langkawi as they travel south from the northern hemisphere. For avid twitchers and nature lovers, this is a unique opportunity to spot a wonderful array of bird species. Langkawi is no stranger to visiting feathered friends.

Of the over 260 bird species on Langkawi, more than 30 percent are migratory, with many visiting between mid-October and early March. Many of Langkawi's migratory birds come to Malaysia from as far away as Manchuria, China and Siberia. Most of the wetland species, like the crakes, rails and herons, can be found among the rice paddies and reed fields of Langkawi, while in the forested areas surrounding The Datai Langkawi, visiting birds include the flycatchers, wabblers, bee-eaters, kingfishers and thrushes.

Small numbers of shorebirds like the Plovers and Sandpipers can be found on the few mudflats located along the south west coast of Langkawi.



A Blue-throated Bee-eater



It's the birds of prey and flycatchers that would interest most birders. Look out for raptors such as Shikra, Besra, Black Baza, Jerdon's Baza and Oriental Honey-buzzards, as well as wetland species like the White-browed Crake, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Watercock, Cinnamon Bittern, Yellow Bittern, Slaty-breasted Rail, Ruddy Kingfisher, and the Black-capped Kingfisher. I would also suggest guests keep a keen eye out for forest birds like the Mugimaki Flycatcher, Siberian Blue Robin, Orange-headed Thrush, as well as open country birds like the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Blue-throated Bee-eater and Blue-tailed Bee-eater.

My favourites are the waterbirds like the rails, bitterns and crakes. These are beautiful



but shy birds. They are secretive in nature, so it can be challenging to spot them. It's always a treat to see them and when we do spot them during a bird outing with our guests it's a cause for celebration.

So, how can guests make the most of these new arrivals? The best way to spot both migratory and resident bird species around the resort is to take early morning walks through the resort's forested trails. If waterbirds are more your thing, try one of the dedicated bird tours, available at The Nature Centre.

Sadly, some of the seasonal visitors to The Datai Langkawi are threatened, due to loss of habitat and illegal poaching, but they find respite among the canopies and mangroves of the resort. Watercocks, like most rails and crakes, and bitterns are on the threatened list. Unfortunately, these birds are trapped for food in many parts of the world and to see them make it back to The Datai Langkawi after their treacherous journey is always like seeing old friends again. ■



clockwise from far left
A Besra Sparrowhawk; Yellow Bittern; Siberian Blue Robin; the vibrant Ruddy Kingfisher



Trigona itama stingless bee

THE BEE'S KNEES

Thomas Bird
discovers the medicinal
qualities of Langkawi's
stingless bees with a visit
to The Datai Langkawi's
own hives.



Nestled within the confines of the forest-enshrouded The Datai Langkawi, The Garden Manager, Zakwan Zamri, is keen to show off a relatively new addition to The Garden. Established to reduce the resort's food waste, tropical herbs and spices like turmeric and exotic fruit such as starfruit are grown on the plot, which the resort kitchens are free to use. However, The Garden's inhabitants are not exclusively botanical.

"Do you see what I'm talking about," he says, pointing to flowering melastoma in purple and white. It takes some moments for my eyes to focus on anything beyond the petals and stems.

"All I can see are these black flies," I tell Zakwan.

"That's them! People often confuse them with flies, but they're bees, stingless bees."

Once they've captured my attention, the stingless bees are, like their bumblebee and honeybee cousins, recognisable by their social nature, a work ethic that gave birth to the "busy bee" adage. Also known as meliponinies, the stingless bees collect pollen before whizzing off to feed their queen-governed colonies, which total eight within The Datai Langkawi's grounds.



clockwise from left:

Bottled honey from The Garden's Bee Farm, available according to season; Pak Long, beekeeper and Zakwan Zamri, Garden Manager, The Datai Langkawi; Manual extraction of honey from egg-shaped pods of Trigona Itama stingless bees



"We started beekeeping last year," says Zakwan, who shows me hives ingeniously housed within logs brought from the nearby tropical forest. "Now we can produce honey for our guests, and other products like soap, too, which can be made from stingless beeswax."

Zakwan, a trained horticulturist, is keen to note the secondary benefits of keeping bees on the hotel grounds. "They help pollinate the plants we grow here, and they pollinate wild jungle plants too," he says, conscious that a healthy ecosystem is as important at the macro level as it is on the micro.

No safety equipment is required to remove the lid from the hive, although the bees can get feisty if humans bother them too much. Peering inside, a whole civilisation is revealed; soldiers, foragers and juveniles (larvae). Beeswax has been spun into an extraordinary structure, a bee city, including small egg-shaped pods from which we humans can procure honey.

"Currently, we're letting the bees rest," Zakwan explains, "Pak Long says you need to give the bees a few months to themselves each year."

Langkawi-born Pak Long was hired as a consultant for the resort's stingless beekeeping initiative. We rendezvous with him at Langkawi Craft Complex – a sizeable bazaar that showcases Malay handicrafts and artwork – to find out how he became the island's stingless bee guru.

"I worked selling fish for over 20 years," the 46-year-old explains. "By 2013, I was frustrated and looking for new opportunities. I tried a few things but nothing really stuck."

At this time, Pak Long was also worried about his infant daughter. "She was always tired; she got ill easily and was negatively affected by the weather. My friend Izhrhar Johari, who lives on the mainland, was keeping stingless bees and suggested I feed my child some honey each day." The results were impressive. "My daughter's vitality returned," he explains.

Inspired, Pak Long set to work. Following Johari's advice, he built a hive in his back garden to make honey for his family. But once word got around, supply could not satisfy demand.

"All the villagers came; everyone wanted to buy some honey from me."

Realising he'd hit on something special, Pak Long went looking for more space as well as a shopfront to vend his homemade honey. When a vacancy appeared at the Langkawi Craft Complex, he applied, and was duly awarded both, a concession to sell honey, as well as an area in the complex grounds for his hives, which now number 30.

"I want people to see this is a quality product," he explains of his open-to-view production line, adding, "your product can be faked and compromised if you don't keep a handle on it."

To this end, Pak Long has spent the last seven years building a reputation as an authority on stingless bees, versing himself in the natural history of insects, which flowers they like (coral vine is a favourite), which subspecies can be used to make honey (he currently keeps four) and of course, how this all informs the end result, honey.

Leading us outside to his stingless bee hives for an exclusive tasting, Pak uses a syringe to procure and place a single drop of golden syrup onto each of our palms, which we dutifully lap up like hungry cats.

"You'll notice the consistency is a little more runny, the colour darker and the flavour slightly more sour than regular honey." He's right, it's runny and sharp, as if blended with lemon juice, though no less delicious than honey made by more common bees. Different hives produce slightly different flavours; some sweeter, some more sour, some stronger, we soon learn. According to the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), stingless bee honey is twice as nutritious as ordinary honey.

When asked how to consume the honey, his answer is less prescriptive: "Any way you like." ■

HEALING FROM THE ROOTS UP

Developed specifically by The Datai Langkawi, Akar spa products tap into traditional Malay healing heritage and the bounty of the land and the sea.

Inspired by the stunning natural beauty of Langkawi, and named for the Malay word for 'roots', the Akar range of holistic spa products used in the Ramuan treatments exclusively available at The Datai Spa are now also available to take home. Made with 100 per cent natural, organic ingredients, the range is divided into three collections, each capturing the healing attributes of three vital Langkawi ecosystems; the rainforest, the sea and the mangroves.

Encompassing the three themes, the four Akar product lines - The Rainforest Seven Flowers, The Rainforest Seven Spices, The Mangrove and The Sea - each feature three products, Body Oil, a Massage, Bath & Shower Oil, and a Body Scrub, as well as a special Body Scrub Oil that can be combined with the Body Scrub to create a polishing paste.

THE RAINFOREST SEVEN FLOWERS

Crafted with extracts from seven flower species that have traditionally been used by royal healers in Malay villages, the Seven Flowers range includes champaka, tuberose, gardenia, ylang ylang, lotus, jasmine, and rose. The flowers are known for their many holistic attributes, which include anti-depressant, anti-viral, and anti-microbial qualities. These species are also known for their effects on calming the nervous system, enhancing the libido, and refreshing the skin.

THE RAINFOREST SEVEN SPICES

Equally valued in traditional Malay medicine as well as Malay cooking, are

the natural spices used in The Rainforest Seven Spices range, which include coriander, clove, star anise, nutmeg, pepper, cinnamon, and cardamom. Used in combination, these spices are powerful antioxidants, analgesics, and anti-inflammatories, and are known to relieve pain, control infection, as well as stimulate the appetite.

THE MANGROVE

Known as crucial nursing grounds for marine species, mangrove plant extracts have been used for centuries in traditional medicine. The Mangrove collection's ingredients include rice, used to treat damaged skin; black glutinous rice, a powerful anti-ageing solution; coconut, which hydrates and protects the skin; mangrove charcoal, which draws out impurities; pandan, which lowers blood pressure; nipa palm, which relieves tension; and cajeput, an antiseptic ingredient.

THE SEA

Renowned as a source of healing ingredients by cultures from across the world, The Sea range is laced with holistic ingredients ranging from seaweed, known for its moisturising and anti-ageing qualities; and hydrating coconut, to healing rice, as well as gotu kola (*pegaga*), which boosts cognitive function and reduces stress; it also contains pearl, which exfoliates and rejuvenates the skin.

Guests at The Datai Langkawi can now take these inspiring products home with them, ensuring the essence of the destination stays with them long after they leave Langkawi. ■



The Mangrove bodycare range from Akar

A NEW ERA FOR LANGKAWI'S ELS CLUB



The Datai Langkawi has taken over management of The Els Club Teluk Datai, introducing an exciting new chapter for the esteemed golf club.

on this page:
The Datai Langkawi will be taking over management of the Hornbill Café at The Els Club Teluk Datai and introducing a new sports bar.

Since it opened in 2014, The Els Club Teluk Datai has made its mark among golfers from across the region and beyond. Sister to the Ocean and Valley Courses at The Els Club Desaru Coast, the Teluk Datai course on Langkawi makes the most of its spectacular, jungle-wreathed setting beside the Indian Ocean with challenging yet approachable fairways and greens created by former World No. 1 Ernie Els. Now, with a new collaboration between The Datai Langkawi and Troon International, a leader in golf facility management, The Els Club Teluk Datai (ECTD) promises to seduce golfers like never before.

The Datai Langkawi took over management of the club's operations this month, with plans to lift the hospitality experience to the same exacting standards as Troon has with the golfing.

"The Els Club Teluk Datai is truly spectacular and is very much like The Datai Langkawi; totally



immersed in nature, with a beautiful mountain backdrop that's also right by the sea," says Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi. "It is also one of the only golf courses in the world with no bunkers, which makes it very pleasant to play on but by no means easy either, as nature provides its own challenges. Troon International has done a great job in setting international standards and bringing focus to this golf course with its immense network. However, it's now time to elevate the whole experience and to integrate the club with The Datai Langkawi."

from top:
The Els Club Teluk Datai; Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi

So, what does this mean for The Els Club? With The Datai Langkawi at the helm, the club is set to benefit from years of internationally recognised service and significantly improved dining, ensuring that golfers and non-golfers alike enjoy their time on and off the links. The main restaurant at the club, The Hornbill Café, named for the iconic bird that graces the rich jungle peaks surrounding the course, will be evolved into a modern grill concept where the emphasis will be on the use of locally-sourced ingredients and exacting service.

In addition, a new sports bar will be introduced in mid-2021; located above the existing restaurant, it will offer both golfers and hotel guests from the neighbouring properties and The Datai Langkawi a more casual and relaxed alternative, screening live sports events and hosting interactive pub games, all while being set in a truly unique and secluded environment. The bar will also serve as an exclusive venue for travellers and residents of the island to visit late into the night, with live music offered, especially on weekends.

The combination of crisp, intelligent service and insightful cuisine with the high standards of Troon International will ensure a world-class golfing destination just minutes from The Datai Langkawi. It will also provide unique opportunities for the resort and golf club to collaborate on stay and play promotions or to offer corporations a seamless golfing, entertaining and accommodation experience.

"Over the years, many of our guests have been asking for an elevated experience at The Els Club, particularly in the area of service as well as food and beverage," says Arnaud. "Also, as our guests tend to stay longer during the high season, they need to have a more flexible golf experience for multiple plays. In the end, we received many guest comments suggesting for The Datai Langkawi to take over their operations entirely, which has now become a reality. With this assurance, we trust that our guests will have an even better overall experience knowing that the service, facilities, culinary experience and attention to detail at The Els Club Teluk Datai will be on par with the level of standards of The Datai Langkawi. ■

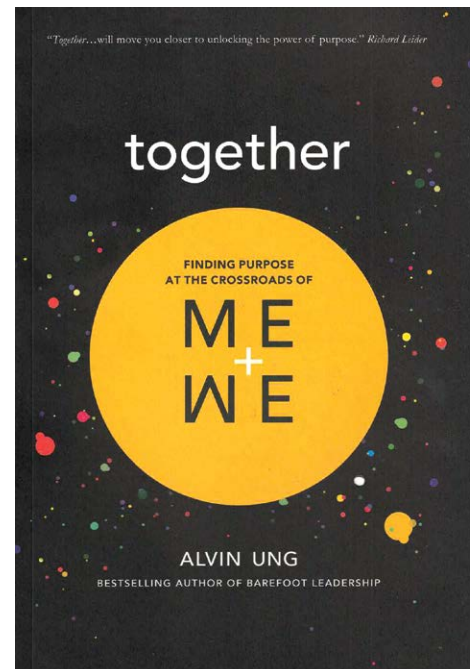


TOGETHER: FINDING PURPOSE AT THE CROSSROADS OF ME+WE

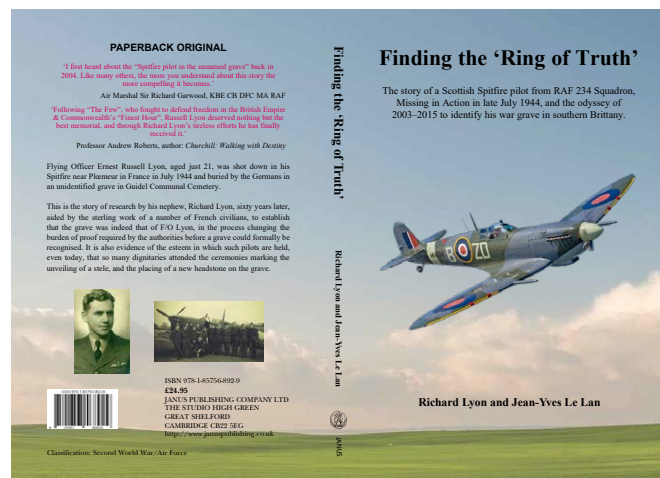
AUTHOR: ALVIN UNG

PUBLISHER: KHAZANAH NASIONAL BERHAD

What drives you? What goals wait in the wings? Determined to give readers alternative perspectives on effective leadership and tools with which to better manage the many hats we all wear in today's busy world, Alvin Ung travelled to 10 Asian countries to learn from 100 purpose-led leaders. In *Together: Finding Purpose at the Crossroads of Me + We*, he compiled vital commentary, wise counsel, and fascinating stories into one accessible book, one which will act as a guide as the reader navigates a world filled with expectations and decisions. In addition to the insights of global leaders from across the region, this self-help book comes with a Connect Me + We model that has been designed to help readers realise their purpose and recognise their priorities.



FINDING THE RING OF TRUTH AUTHORS: RICHARD LYON AND JEAN-YVES LE LAN PUBLISHER: JANUS PUBLISHING



A book about determination, heroism, and honour, *Finding the Ring of Truth* tells of the story of 234 (F) Squadron Spitfire pilot Flight Officer Russell Lyon, shot down over Brittany on July 27, 1944, and of the efforts to find and gain recognition for his final resting place. Written by the pilot's nephew, Richard Lyon, and French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Lan, this captivating tome details the intense research undertaken by both the Lyon family and dedicated French civilians to confirm that an unknown grave was in fact that of the young war hero, and in doing so change regulations that allow other fallen soldiers to be similarly recognised. A story of passion, perseverance, admiration, and respect, this book is as much about a family's own struggle as it is about a generation remembering the ultimate and echoing sacrifices made by so many.



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