

ISSUE #5

IKHLAS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DATAI LANGKAWI



A PATTERN
FOR
PRESERVATION

CALL
OF THE
DOLPHINS

PROTECTING
LANGKAWI'S
AQUATIC JEWELS

CLASH
OF THE
TITANS



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IKHLAS

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Welcome to *IKHLAS*, the magazine of The Datai Langkawi and the first issue that we have released since the resort reopened (after the nationwide lockdown for most of the year 2021).

It's been a challenging two years to say the least, with Malaysia's borders closed to international travellers since March 2020, and even our beautiful island of Langkawi off limits to domestic travellers for many months at a time. However, we have used the resort's closure to refine our training programmes, to develop additional sustainability and environmental initiatives, to forge new partnerships with local communities and NGOs, and most certainly to focus on our team member's well-being. The result, I believe, is that The Datai Langkawi is positioned better than ever to welcome guests and look after its workforce, while engaging in a multitude of initiatives to support the environment and communities surrounding it and beyond.

With Langkawi being a part of the country's first travel bubble, we're optimistic about the future and look forward to 2022 being a year that allows us to once again welcome guests from all over the world back to The Datai Langkawi. And what a year 2022 promises to be; with an enthusiastic new focus on wellness, and the continuation of our popular The Chef Series between January and October that sees some of the country's leading culinary talents visit the resort (this being only Part 1, we look forward to bringing even more chefs representing the eclectic cuisine of Malaysia to our resort in the future), the year ahead promises to represent a triumphant return for The Datai Langkawi. Of course, until you're able to visit us yourself, we'll keep you up to date with all the excitement across our magazine's three issues in 2022, as well as our dedicated The Datai app.

It's been a tough year but there's light at the end of the tunnel and I look forward to seeing both new and familiar faces, as we welcome the world back to Langkawi again.

Arnaud Girodon
General Manager
The Datai Langkawi

IKHLAS

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Malaysia



JOHNSON WONG

Gen, Penang
6-7 January



MAKOTO SAITO SAM

Sushi Hibiki, Kuala Lumpur
25-27 February



AZLI AHMAD

OpenHouse, Kuala Lumpur
22-23 April



RAYMOND THAM

Beta and Skillet, Kuala Lumpur
17-18 June



MASASHI HORIUCHI

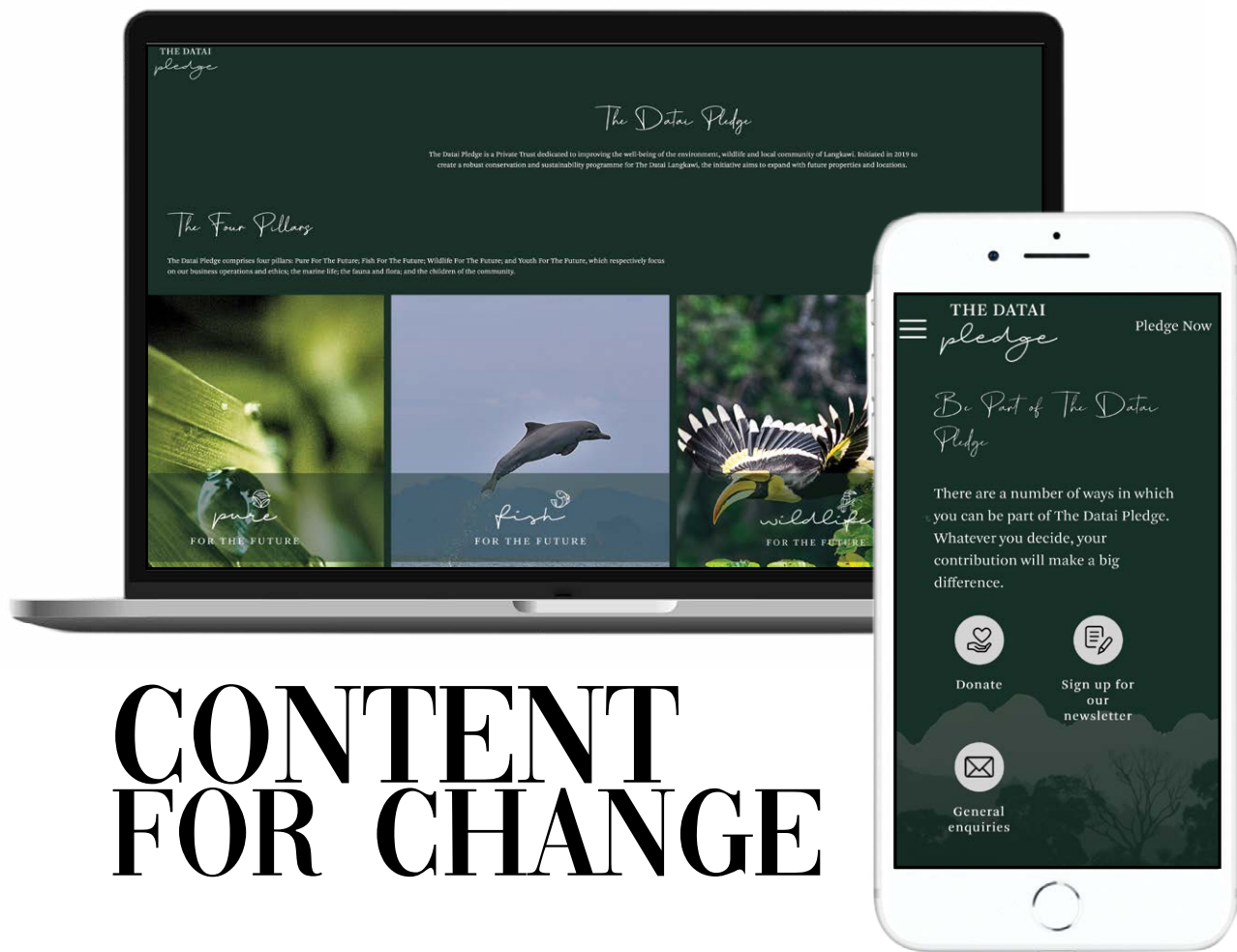
Entier, Kuala Lumpur
18-19 August



SRICHARAN VENKATESH

Nadodi, Kuala Lumpur
6-7 October

BRINGING YOU THE BEST FROM
MALAYSIA'S ECLECTIC DINING EXPERIENCES
- PART 1 -



CONTENT FOR CHANGE

Informing and inspiring guests, while showcasing the different projects and successes of The Datai Langkawi’s sustainability initiatives, the resort has developed dedicated web and social media channels for The Datai Pledge.

As part of the development of The Datai Pledge, The Datai Langkawi’s comprehensive sustainability initiative, a dedicated website and social media channels have been created to ensure guests can stay up to date with news of the ambitious programme’s progress and the many people involved in this environmental endeavour.

“We live in an area where our business is successful because of where we are; a place that’s home to a primary rainforest, one of the world’s most beautiful beaches and the region’s oldest rock formations, and if we don’t protect these assets our business is going to suffer,” says Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi and Executive Administrator, The Datai Pledge. “In addition, we need to protect and bolster the local community to make these efforts sustainable.”

The Datai Pledge, inspired by Head Naturalist, Irshad Mobarak (*read more about him on pages 59-61*), is an essential partnership between the resort and local conservation NGOs as well as social enterprises dedicated to protecting and supporting Datai Bay and Langkawi Island. However, it’s also a model that can be exported beyond The Datai Langkawi and applied to other threatened ecosystems.



“We want to be as transparent as possible and for guests to see what we are doing on a constant basis.”

Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi and Executive Administrator, The Datai Pledge

“The Impact Report is a crucial component of The Datai Pledge because it offers transparency in terms of donations collected (*including voluntary donations by resort guests*) and use of proceeds, while also offering summaries of the key activities in each pillar, and statistics on the projects’ milestones, for example the number of bottles recycled and the tonnes of waste diverted in a given period,” says Arnaud.

Produced locally, The Datai Pledge website is also a chance for the many researchers, scientists, naturalists and partners to discuss what problems they are tackling and how they are contributing to the goals of The Datai Pledge.

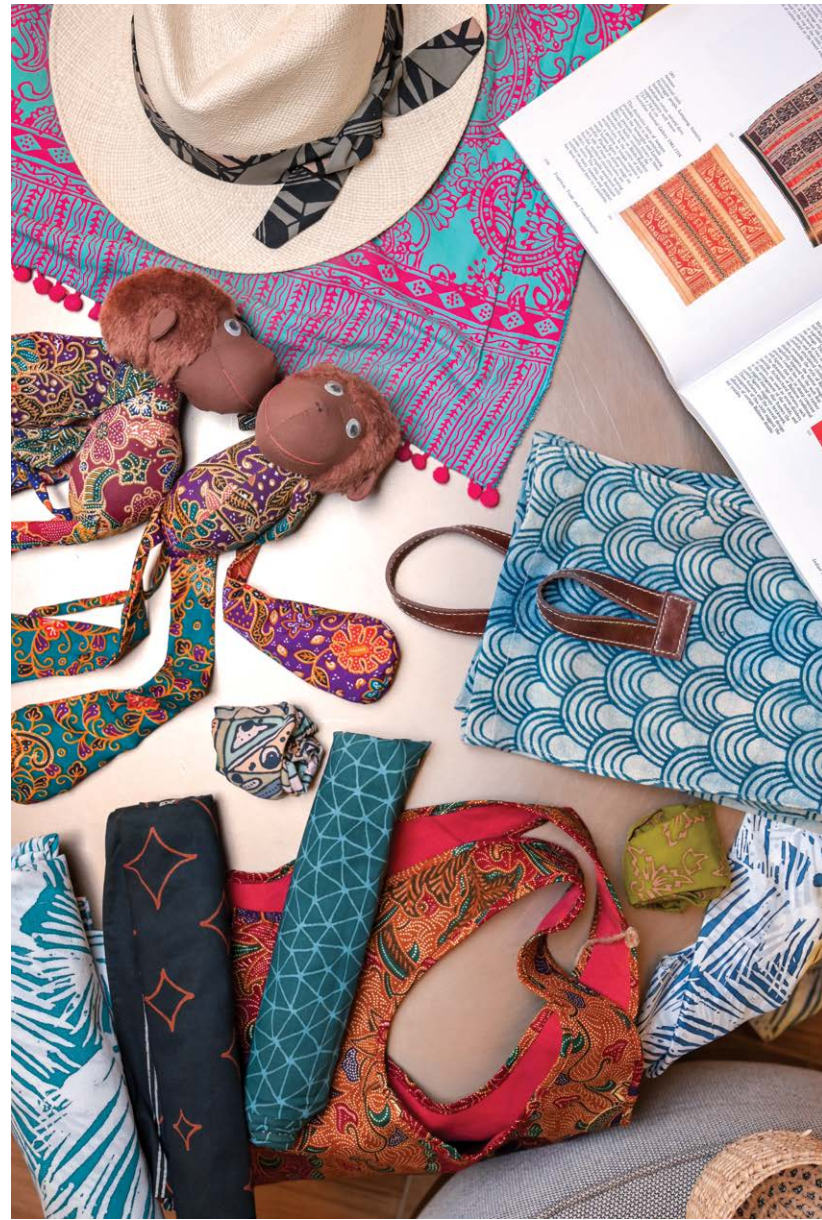
“We want to be as transparent as possible and for guests to see what we are doing on a constant basis, which projects we are currently focusing on, how they can participate and in doing so, hopefully trigger engagement and donations for the initiatives that are currently almost all funded by The Datai Langkawi with all proceeds channelled to our partner NGOs,” says Arnaud. “We have received an overwhelmingly positive response from guests to date and with the number of projects we are involved with, there is an access point for every guest, from cooking classes to nature walks – so many that we are currently recruiting more naturalists and marine biologists.”

While the initial focus of The Datai Langkawi’s web and social media content has been on international travellers, that focus is now also targeted on the local market as Malaysia increasingly shows real concern for the environment and how to protect it, from a personal as well as official standpoint. “We will now focus on how to emulate these efforts beyond the resort, and we can already see, through social media, that our successes are inspiring other projects around the island, which in turn allows us to increasingly advocate for local authorities to do more for Langkawi,” says Arnaud.

The four pillars of The Datai Pledge – Pure for the Future, Fish for the Future, Wildlife for the Future and Youth for the Future, which respectively focus on the resort’s business operations and ethics; the marine life; the fauna and flora; and the children of the community – encompass an array of activities and projects, undertaken by the resort’s team of resident naturalists, marine biologists, and experts, in conjunction with local communities, NGOs and social enterprises.

“We are driven by passionate advocates who really want to make a difference,” says Arnaud. “We have started slow and locally, cleaning out our own environment first, but slowly and surely the projects are getting wider - although mainly in Langkawi - and now we want to emulate those actions further afield.”

Ensuring guests and stakeholders can follow the resort’s progress, The Datai Langkawi has created a dedicated The Datai Pledge website as well as social media channels that will increase awareness, chronicle the development of new initiatives, introduce the many passionate environmental campaigners and advocates behind them, and present an annual Impact Report that will be made available to stakeholders, press, as well as all guests, and which details audited financials, specific challenges and real-world achievements made by The Datai Pledge projects.



You don't have to spend much time in Malaysia before you come across batik, the traditional patterns of which are found incorporated into many facets of traditional life in the country. Despite its origins in Java, batik has long been a fundamental component of Malaysian identity, and one that helps link the country's rich past with its present.

So, what exactly is batik? Traditionally, batik is the creation of patterns on fabric through a process that sees wax used to control where dye penetrates the cloth - usually cotton, silk, linen, rayon or hemp - and where it doesn't, resulting in intricate patterns. In fact, the name combines the Malay word for dot or point, *titik*, referring to the traditional process of applying the wax in dots, and the Japanese word *amba*, meaning 'to write'.

Batik was introduced to Malaysia in the 13th century and is especially popular in the east coast states of Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu. Rather than using the wax-resist process, Malaysian batik's iconic geometric designs and nature motifs - leaves, waves and even butterflies - are often achieved through a brush painting method (and increasingly through commercial stamping) that creates a larger, lighter, more



A PATTERN FOR PRESERVATION

The timeless art of batik is central to the Malaysian identity and is now being preserved by local designers in their contemporary collections.



vibrant pattern that's found in everything from traditional national dress to contemporary couture.

Batik plays an important role in formal wear in Malaysia, with men often wearing batik shirts at dinner events and women incorporating elements of batik into modern ensembles. In fact, the Malaysian government encourages civil servants to wear batik at specific times each month and many schools, government departments and organisations will commission their own batik pattern as a uniform.

Today, batik is prized for its variety, its intricacy, and the dedication required to produce it in the original style, and while it plays an important role in traditional culture, its incorporation by Malaysian designers into contemporary collections maintains the craft's role as a point of national pride.



You can add flashes of authentic batik to your own wardrobe at *The Boutique at The Datai Lankgawi*, which includes in its collections, pieces from *Suria Artisan Batik*, vibrant *Solaris Batik Bags*, eye catching beach *Batik towels* from *Kykullo*, and men's shirts, clutches, facemasks and *Panama hats* from contemporary fashion brand *Kapten Batik*, the owners of which are currently collaborating with the resort on additional collections. Read more about *Kapten Batik* on pg 30.

THE BEST THINGS TAKE TIME

Enjoyed across Malaysia, Rendang is a timeless dish that captures the essence of home cooking and the diversity of Malay spices and flavours.



Short Rib Rendang (Rendang Tulang Rusuk) sprinkled with roasted cinnamon and cardamom powder by Chef Nazrie at The Gulai House

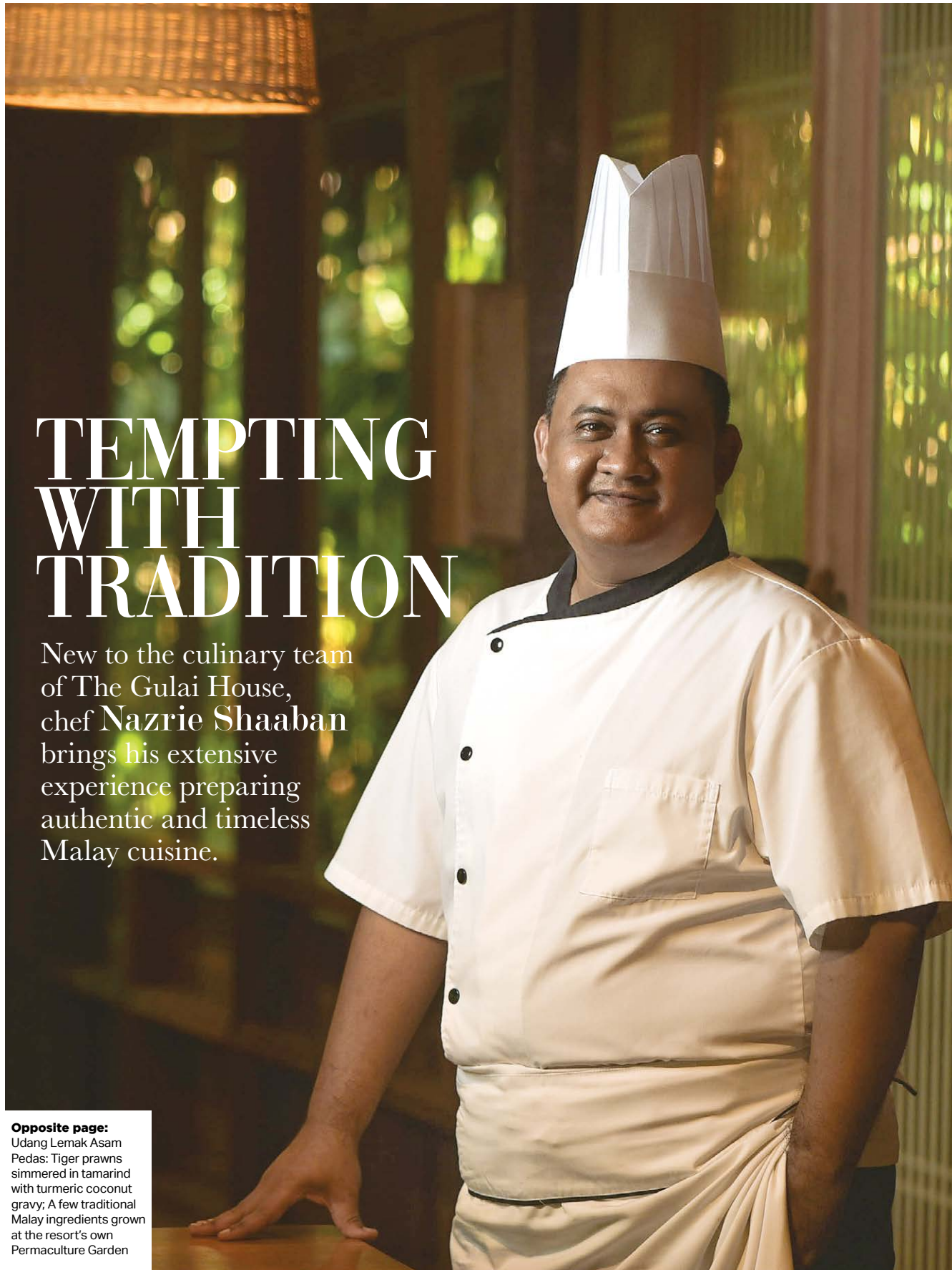
Of the Malaysian dishes widely recognised and enjoyed overseas, Rendang is among the most famous and like so many iconic dishes, its origins are not quite as clear-cut as its popularity. While Rendang, a dish of meat (usually beef but sometimes chicken) slow-cooked and braised in a thick broth of coconut milk and spices, has been traced to the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, trade and migration over centuries led to it becoming one of the most iconic and beloved Malaysian dishes, one that can be found served at special occasions across the nation.

Even if you've never tried rendang you'll probably recognise it for its thick texture and rich dark colour. The meat is lovingly cooked in the broth, which is laced with assorted spices, including turmeric, lemongrass, shallots, galangal, ginger, chillies and garlic, until the liquid evaporates, ensuring a rich, hearty flavour and caramelised meat that falls apart at the touch. However, this is a time-consuming process (eight hours or more), so it shouldn't come as a surprise that traditionally Rendang is reserved for special occasions, including Hari Raya and wedding feasts.

Like many dishes that have travelled, Rendang has evolved; it's commonly believed that Rendang in Malaysia tends to be dark brownish red rather than the black hue (caused by the intense caramelisation) often seen in Indonesia. This results from a slightly shorter cooking time and a wetter Rendang with a gravy that's packed with coconut oil.

Another influence that has seen Malaysian Rendang evolve from Indonesian Rendang is the influence of Indian cooking, with some chefs in Malaysia adding *kerisik* or roasted crushed grated coconut for additional flavour and texture, as well as *kencur* or aromatic ginger, *lawang* flowers, cinnamon and even brown sugar, ingredients that are often associated with Indian cuisine. The result is a lighter, sweeter and more fragrant take on the Sumatran classic.

At The Gulai House, Chef Nazrie prepares his popular Beef Rendang using Australian Wagyu short rib, which is cooked and served on the bone, adding a more intense flavour to one of Malaysia's most beloved dishes.



TEMPTING WITH TRADITION

New to the culinary team of The Gulai House, chef Nazrie Shaaban brings his extensive experience preparing authentic and timeless Malay cuisine.

Opposite page:
 Udang Lemak Asam Pedas: Tiger prawns simmered in tamarind with turmeric coconut gravy; A few traditional Malay ingredients grown at the resort's own Permaculture Garden



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS INGREDIENTS AND COOKING TECHNIQUES YOU'LL PRESENT AT THE RESTAURANT?

Like all Malay chefs, I like using local herbs and spices when cooking, as I believe they help to enhance the flavours of each dish. Some of the staples we use every day include screw pine leaves (also known as pandan, which feature in so many Malay dishes, both sweet and savoury), cinnamon, cardamon, dried chilli, star anise, cloves and curry powder.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL DISHES THAT HAVE BEEN MODERNISED ON THE NEW MENU?

At The Gulai House, we pride ourselves in offering authentic Malay cuisine, so all the traditional dishes offered are prepared in the traditional ways. This means that sometimes we need to warn a guest that a dish might be a little spicy but that's all part of the exploration of authentic Malay cuisine. However, I do pay extra attention to the way the dishes are presented to guests and of course we use premium produce to help elevate each dish.

YOUR CULINARY TEAM HAS ACCESS TO THE DATAI LANGKAWI'S EXTENSIVE PERMACULTURE GARDENS; WHAT INGREDIENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE GROWN IN THE GARDEN AND WHICH DO YOU RELY ON FOR THE NEW MENU?

The gardeners at the Permaculture Garden already produce a great array of classic Malay ingredients, including important additions like pandan, Vietnamese coriander (*daun kesum* in Malay) and even centella leaf (commonly known as *gotu kola*). I'd like them to start growing lemuni leaf, which is good for beautiful skin and is especially popular in Ipoh and Penang. We use the juice from these leaves to cook rice.

WHAT'S ONE DISH ON THE NEW MENU THAT GUESTS SHOULD NOT MISS?

We have a dish called Rendang Tulang Rusuk, which is an elevated take on the classic Beef Rendang in which we use Australian Wagyu shortrib and cook the beef on the rib to intensify the flavours. The result is a beef dish full of flavour that almost melts in your mouth.

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO COOK?

I grew up in a house filled with talented female cooks; my mother and my younger sisters, and it was a family tradition that everyone would come together to prepare and cook as a family. As I became more involved in the preparation, I started to gain interest in the cuisine and the various methods of cooking. I learned that each locality has its own signature dishes and style of cooking, and I've always loved visiting local villages to learn from them directly.

YOU'VE BEEN A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE OF TRADITIONAL MALAY CUISINE AND HAVE WORKED IN HERITAGE-STYLE KITCHENS INCLUDING LABU SAYONG SIGNATURE AND MERU IN PERAK. WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE MALAY DISHES TO COOK?

While I have many favourites, I would say that Asam Pedas Daging Tetel, a spicy and sour curry, is my signature and I've always received very good feedback from guests with this dish. Packed with flavour, this traditional curry is usually served with fish and is most popular in the states of Perak, Melaka and Johor.

TELL US ABOUT THE DINING EXPERIENCE YOU WOULD LIKE TO OFFER GUESTS AT THE GULAI HOUSE.

We want to offer the experience of traditional Malay cuisine but present it in an elegant and contemporary style, one that's more approachable for our international guests. At The Gulai House, we aim to present an authentic dining experience, one that's memorable and hospitable and personalised, and which represents the true flavours of Malaysia. Guests will have the chance to try Malay dishes as they are enjoyed by locals from across the country.



FROM THE GARDEN TO THE FOREST

Continuing The Datai Langkawi's passionate approach to sustainability, the resort's new cocktail list is packed with locally foraged flora, herbs and botanicals.

There's nothing quite like farewelling another day in Langkawi with cocktails at sunset. The resort's newest collection of concoctions continues The Datai Langkawi's mantra of sustainability and connection with nature, with each drink laced with locally sourced ingredients that give a true sense of place.

To introduce these unique flavours, the mixology team has employed a sous-vide machine to gently and consistently infuse a host of curious and enticing ingredients into base spirits, including the recently introduced The Datai Gin and The Datai Vodka, craft spirits produced specifically for the resort.

Highlights of the new menu include *Bunga* (or 'flowers' in Malay), an alluring and floral take on the classic Vesper Martini with roselle-infused vodka, dry vermouth, and The Datai Gin infused with butterfly pea, jasmine (or *melur putih*), grapefruit skin, lime peel, cardamom, and juniper

berries. With its delicate jasmine aroma, this elegant cocktail pays homage to the flowers worn in the hair of Malay women on special occasions.

Packing a little more punch, *Kopi Kampung* (or loosely translated as 'local coffee' in Malay), a drink developed by rising star mixologist Alimi from The Beach Club, combines Antica Formula, orange bitters and tonic water with rum infused with coffee from Kedah, star anise, cardamom, orange peel, and brown sugar. The result is a complex and aromatic aperitif with a nostalgic aroma of local *Kopi O Kaw* (a colloquial term for strong brewed coffee).

Finally, *Kesom Boi* is an herbaceous martini-style elixir with dried preserved plum (*asamboi*), lime, and 'kesum gin', which has been crafted with The Datai Gin as a base, local *daun kesom* coriander, calamansi juice and skin, juniper, and iconic Malaysian ingredient pandan, which lends a sweetness to the spirit.

From left to right:

The Butterfly: Floral and citrusy with butterfly pea, elderflower and Cointreau;
Bunga: The Datai's take on the Vesper Martini with roselle and jasmine;
Kesom Boi: a herbaceous martini with The Datai Gin and dried preserved plum;
Surfing Neroli: a tangy smoked Negroni with orange bitters;
Kopi Kampung: a complex aperitif with a nostalgic aroma of local Kopi O Kaw

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The biodynamic wines of Rheinhessen's Wittmann Estate have helped keep this family-run winery, one of the region's oldest, at the forefront of Germany's boutique viticultural scene.



Three and a half centuries is a significant milestone in almost any industry but in the competitive German wine scene, it's a mark of consistency, tradition, and excellence. That's not to say that Wittmann Estate, which has been growing grapes and producing wine in the small Rheinhessen wine belt village of Westhofen since 1663, isn't ready to depart from tradition in the interest of creating something truly spectacular.

Led by Gault Millau Winemaker of the Year 2014 Philipp Wittmann, who is aided by his wife Eva and his parents, Weingut Wittmann embraced organic and biodynamic viticulture practices in 1990 and 2004 respectively. Organic wines are produced from grapes that are grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers, and all ingredients going into these wines, which includes yeast, must be certified organic, while biodynamic wine is made with a set of farming practices that views the farm or vineyard as one solid organism, with each portion of the farm or vineyard contributing to the next.

The winery was an early adopter of this global movement in the region and applied its principles to its own signature style of full-bodied, balanced dry white wines, which include Riesling, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris, and Silvaner - a varietal that has a long history in Rheinhessen.

At The Datai Langkawi, at which Philipp and Eva have been regular guests for years, Wittmann's 2017 Silvaner Trocken is coveted among dry white aficionados with its delicate fruity nuances, fine floral aromas and long, lingering finish, while the 100% certified biodynamic 2018 Silvaner Trocken from the acclaimed Morstein Grand Cru vineyards offers a kaleidoscope of stone fruit and citrus flavours set against a backdrop of dense cobalt.

In a truly indulgent encounter, these wines and others by Wittmann Estate were paired with the world-class cuisine of acclaimed German chef Nils Henkel of two Michelin-starred Restaurant Schwarzenstein, who visited The Datai Langkawi in 2020 as part of The Chef Series.



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Ronnefeldt works closely with creative designers and trusted partners in order to produce attractive high-quality product packaging, much of which is made of natural and eco-friendly materials. In fact, the packaging for the pre-portioned solutions LeafCup®, Tea-Caddy®, Joy of Tea® and the new organic collection “100%” are made of sustainable resources. For the ultimate journey through the world’s greatest tea gardens, the Teastar® collection features 16 tea blends that are plucked most carefully and produced in small batches.

Ronnefeldt closely cooperates with foundations, organisations and NGOs such as Childaid Network, Ethical Tea Partnership and The German Tea Association, to improve social and environmental standards in the tea growing regions. Since its establishment the company has been committed to building long-term and sustainable relationships with partners in the countries of origin.

Enjoy a selection of Ronnefeldt teas as part of your complimentary in-room amenities at the Datai Langkawi.

Visit the Ronnefeldt website to learn more about the world of excellent teas at www.ronnefeldt.com

Hardly anything is as timeless as tea. Traded from East to West for centuries, tea bridges cultures and connects people and passions around the world. Since 1823, one of the world’s leading and exclusive tea brands has been Ronnefeldt, founded in Frankfurt by Johann Tobias Ronnefeldt and today managed by Jan-Berend Holzapfel, the current owner of the family business. Ronnefeldt sources the finest loose-leaf teas from the world’s most outstanding tea gardens, providing consumers with a truly luxurious experience that is based on the heritage and tradition of the company.

By developing worldwide tea standards Ronnefeldt has become an international household name. The company specialises in the finest tea blends, sourcing the best tea qualities from many origin countries like India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and Africa. The world’s leading hotels and restaurants offer the loose leaf teas and sophisticated pre-portioned solutions that are supplied by the family-owned business. Moreover, an increasing number of consumers enjoy Ronnefeldt teas at home, due to premium retail outlets and online channels like in Bangkok, Dubai, Moscow, Istanbul and the United States.

The entire tea harvesting process is undertaken with the highest standards of craftsmanship and professional management, including gentle withering, rolling, fermentation, drying and sorting to achieve the highest leaf grades. In addition, modern technology, sustainable supply chains, quality management and an experienced tea tasting team consistently ensure the superior quality of Ronnefeldt teas.



A BREW THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

Tea plays an important role in many timeless wellness cultures, including traditional Malay medicine, and the specialist tea used in the resort's new tea turn-down service will continue that holistic journey for guests at The Datai Langkawi.

Herbal tea blends have long been heralded for their natural medicinal qualities, not just in Asia but around the world, and to help make the most of their healthy attributes, a selection of herbal teas have been curated and grown in The Datai Langkawi's Permaculture Garden. We take a closer look at the different ingredients used as part of the new service and their health benefits.

MINT

Known as *pudina* in Malay and commonly enjoyed in Asia, India, the Middle East and Britain, mentha or mint leaves are used in a wide range of products, including herbal tea blends, thanks to their proven ability to reduce head and stomach aches, clear sinuses, improve mental faculties, and even reduce stress levels.

The mint leaves used at The Datai Langkawi have been grown in the Permaculture Garden and dehydrated to intensify their flavour. To prepare, roll the mint leaves between your palms to draw out the natural oils. Then place in a teapot and cover with boiling water for five minutes. You might want to add a touch of honey for additional sweetness.

TURMERIC

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) or *kunyit* in Malay is another popular tea herb as well as

a vital cooking ingredient in both Malay and Indian cuisines. Known to boost digestion while reducing gas and bloating, turmeric leaves are often used to flavour rendangs or curries, while its flowers are used in salads popular in the eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia such as Kelantan and Terengganu.

Also grown in The Datai Langkawi's Permaculture Garden, turmeric is recognised as one of the healthiest nutritional supplements in existence; its active ingredient, curcumin, benefits both body and brain thanks to its powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, while potentially lowering your risk of heart disease and even cancer.

ULAM RAJA

Another turndown tea that's also popular in the kitchen, Ulam Raja ('the king salad' in Malay) or kenikir is often enjoyed with sambal or is used as a garnish. However, this ingredient is also praised for its ability to increase circulation and reduce body heat, while strengthening bones, fighting infection and even slowing the ageing process.

Harvested and dehydrated by the team at the Permaculture Garden, Ulam Raja leaves are packed with antioxidants and are known to reduce hypertension, inflammation and even blood glucose levels.



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CREATIVE STREAK



Continuing its Artist in Residence series, which showcases artisanal talents from across Malaysia, The Atelier welcomes basket crafter **David Cho** and leather craftsman **Chim Yee Hui**.



ATELIER CHIM

Selangor-born Chim Yee Hui always had an artistic streak. As a child she made origami, patchwork and quilts by hand and even after studying Electrical and Electronic Engineering at university, she still found herself fascinated with the artistry behind everyday objects.

Inspired by Japanese notebooks that she discovered in a bookstore, Hui set out to learn more about the timeless art of leathercraft, purchasing tools and taking an intensive leatherwork course in Taipei. Motivated to learn more, Hui took a leap of faith, leaving her engineering job and joining a leather restoration company in Kuala Lumpur, where she learned to repair and restore luxury handbags.

During this time Hui studied French, passing France's strict language proficiency test so that she could continue her leather studies in Paris, the traditional home of luxury leather craftsmanship, completing the demanding CAP Maroquinerie course, while also interning at a workshop that restored classic Hermès handbags.

Taking the skills she learned as a prototypist working for renowned French luxury brand Moynat, Hui launched Atelier Chim in 2018, delivering the world of luxury leather production, including specialised skills like saddle stitching, to Kuching in Sarawak, where she now lives.

Meeting the growing demand for artisanal and personalised products, Atelier Chim produces made-to-order and bespoke leather pieces in a variety of fine French or Italian leathers using an array of timeless techniques, including hot stamping, on a series of imported machines. Marrying east and west, Hui currently produces luxurious handbags, purses and coin wallets, and is exploring how to add more local cultural elements into her collections.



HERITAGE BASKETS

Handcrafted by Negeri Sembilan-native David Cho Chee Min, Heritage Baskets are a series of intricate artisanal steel wire forms that preserve the tradition of the Chinese wire skimmers or *zhàolǐ* (spider) that David's father manufactured in Kuala Lumpur in the 1960s and 1970s. As a child, David and his siblings learned at their father's side to manually craft the steel wire into the iconic shape of the 'spider', producing skimmers as well as other essential kitchen staples.

David only returned to his craft in recent years, turning to wire cutting as a means to help keep his elderly mother active and agile. Baskets were crafted and given away as gifts to family and friends until they found fame on social media accounts created by his daughters, Eleen and Elizabeth.

Employing the same techniques that are used to make the *zhàolǐ*, David's nostalgia-evoking and meticulously crafted baskets are not only practical but are breathtaking in their intricacy. While designs vary, each basket features the radial 'spider' motif at its base, as a tribute to David's father.

Comprising thousands of loops and twists, all of which are crafted by hand, each creation is a play on form, proportion and detail, examining and elevating the humble skimmer design into mesmerising objets d'art.





WHEN MODERNITY MEETS ANTIQUITY

Part of a growing national renaissance of traditional arts and crafts, **Kapten Batik** has incorporated timeless Malaysian batik patterns into its contemporary fashion collections.

Kapten Batik is the creation of former engineers-turned-entrepreneurs Farhan Omar and Ekram Faiz, who recognised the decline in the use of traditional batik by young Malaysians and developed a clothing label that sought to inject batik with a contemporary energy while preserving its timeless processes.

Launched in Kuala Lumpur and inspired by the founders' travels through Asia, Kapten Batik fuses classic tailoring with modern batik designs created in the traditional Malaysian style. The brand has grown from strength to strength as a new generation embraces this new fusion and begins to wear batik every day, not just for formal occasions.

To maintain this balance between the past and the present, Kapten Batik employs master craftsmen as well as in-house designers to create dynamic motifs that pay homage to tradition while also capturing iconic scenes of Malaysia. In fact, many of these *sui generis* designs are inspired by Farhan and Ekram's own travels, with prints then applied to sustainable fabrics, including Supima*-certified cotton in the case of the Masterpiece series (which is produced using 1,000-year-old techniques) and GOTS-certified** organic cotton for items in the Maharaja series. Fabrics are stringently tested to OEKO-TEX standards to ensure they are free of harmful chemicals and substances.

Initially specialising in men's batik shirts - each a sturdy yet stylish item with button down collar, hand-carved buttons, and versatile seams - the company is now expanding its lines. It recently launched the Together21 collection of menswear, which includes feather-soft shirts in vibrant and soft-hued prints with both contemporary and traditional elements; and has revamped its Nusantara series with new in-house designs set against mercerised*** cotton.

Kapten Batik has also introduced women's kaftans, men's swimwear, the Pure Linen series of resort wear which features European linen flax; and Kapten Batik PRIVE, a made-to-measure service that offers a highly bespoke approach to batik creations for discerning customers.

Visit the Kapten Batik website to browse through their collection at www.kaptenbatik.com.my

*Supima certified cotton is 35% longer than regular cotton, which makes the fibre stronger and considerably softer

**GOTS is a worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres

***Mercerisation is a textile finishing treatment that increases lustre, strength and smoothness

THE BATIK BARON

Engineer-turned-fashionista **Farhan Omar** created Kapten Batik to add a modern touch to Malaysia's timeless batik tradition.



WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU AND CO-FOUNDER EKRAM FAIZ TO CREATE A MODERN BATIK FASHION LABEL?

Back in 2016, we noticed traditional batik was in decline and that young people were wearing batik less and less. We wanted to start a batik evolution, so that batik would no longer be considered old fashioned and all generations could feel excited about our heritage again - to do this, we revamped the whole process from scratch.

Once we decided on this approach, we used travel as our inspiration. We love to travel and we love to see the things we have seen converted into art by combining the traditional batik technique with the finest fabrics.

DO YOU COME FROM A FASHION BACKGROUND?

No. Both of us are engineering graduates who have become fashion entrepreneurs. Our engineering skills, which help in the making of decisions and the direction of the brand, produce a different approach to that of the men's fashion retail industry.

WHAT ROLE DOES BATIK PLAY IN MALAYSIAN CULTURE?

Batik symbolises Malaysian lifestyle and culture. We put all the art of our surroundings into the patterns on the fabric and wear it proudly. Batik art is our cultural practice, passed down from generation to generation. Batik is also an important element in our textile industry and Malaysia's approach in terms of colour, technique and motifs is very different from giant producers in other countries. Malaysian batik is more modern, flexible and suitable for a multi-ethnic country.

WE'RE SEEING A NUMBER OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGNERS EMPLOYING BATIK INTO THEIR PRODUCTS; WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS FUELLED THIS RENAISSANCE?

There's a growing awareness and an evolution of how batik can be used today and as demand increases, more young designers are using batik in their fashion. Once again, you can see people in their batik, especially for social weekend drinks and even as resort wear.

TELL US ABOUT THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS FOR KAPTEN BATIK'S BATIK PRINTS.

We always snap a lot of photos during our travels and these photos are used by our team of textile designers to design contemporary patterns that they then pass on to our block artisan to create a batik block from brass, copper or wood. We work with our skilful master artisan to use the block to create a new pattern on a piece of greige fabric; we don't use ready-made fabric as we need a base that's breathable and comfortable, so we use fine cotton weave instead.

HOW ARE YOUR MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF BATIK RECEIVED BY MALAYSIANS?

We have seen tremendous results over the past four years. All generations and all ethnicities are wearing our batik and we love it - especially when they tag us while they are travelling and proudly wearing Malaysian batik.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT NEXT FROM KAPTEN BATIK?

As our aim is to be a lifestyle brand, we are partnering with the likes of The Datai Langkawi, Malaysia Airlines and Disney to reach our potential clientele. We are about to launch our first ever women's collection and our Pulau brand, which specialises in men's tailored swim shorts. As an environmentally conscious brand, we have stopped using single-use plastics and by 2022, all our products will be produced using organic cotton, certified to GOTS and OEKO Tex standards.



THE GREEN CARPENTER

The creator of over 700 pieces, woodcraftsman **Harith Ridzuan** continues a family legacy, while pioneering and advocating sustainable practices that extend beyond handmade furniture.

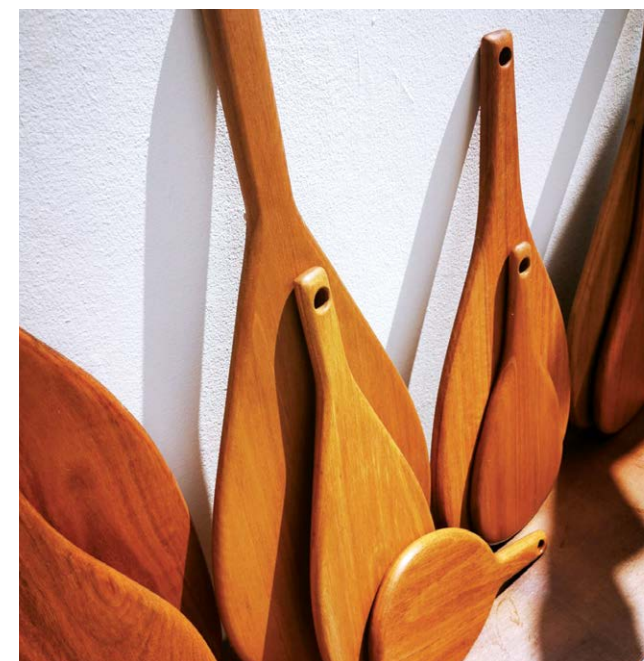
YOU HELM YOUR FAMILY'S 28-YEAR-OLD WOOD MANUFACTURING COMPANY; WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO 'GO GREEN' AND FOCUS ON MORE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION METHODS?

I started working in my parents' factory when I was 10 years old, so I practically grew up in the industry. After graduating in 2008, I went for professional training and delved deeper into the industry, working with people from a wide range of backgrounds and managing both small to large scale interior projects.

Even though the Malaysian wood industry is one of the largest in the world, very little was done for sustainability; I decided to put sustainability at the heart of what I do and to give justice and respect to the natural resources we use, something that's captured in our tagline *Saving the World, One Piece at a Time*.

WHAT WERE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FACING THE MALAYSIA TIMBER INDUSTRY?

The top issues I identified were the amount of waste being generated; the poor monitoring of local material sourcing, which created a negative perception among western countries towards Malaysia's forest management; and illegal logging. We're now seeing more public awareness and a government push for more sustainability in the industry, but we still have a long way to go.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WOOD IS PRODUCED SUSTAINABLY?

Wood is one of the most sustainable materials on earth. It's renewable and can be harvested sustainably; it's a carbon sink material and is the only material that has negative carbon balance; and compared to other materials, wood is very energy efficient in terms of production of energy.

Buying quality furniture is a long-term investment and doing this right from the beginning guarantees years of comfort. We need to be more proactive as responsible consumers, so be sure to buy locally produced pieces made from locally sourced eco-friendly materials like certified, reclaimed or plantation wood; and opt for non-toxic glue and water-based, natural oil or wax coatings.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR GREEN HAMMER PROGRAMME.

The Green Hammer is an outreach programme of The Green Factory. It spreads awareness of sustainable wood production and consumption. We give talks, conduct factory tours and workshops, and work with media to push for sustainable manufacturing.

I also founded the Green Design Malaysia community, where we discuss issues of green design and the business of sustainability. We have reached around 1,300 members to date.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES, INCLUDING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS LIKE THE LAB, AT THE DATAI LANGKAWI?

This is definitely something other resorts can learn from. As consumers are increasingly more aware of sustainability, they will demand more from their service provider or their holiday accommodation. There are also many benefits for organisations that put sustainability at the core of their operations, such as improved positive perception in the public eye, attracting quality talent, reducing operation cost, and creating new revenue streams.

WHAT HAS WORKING WITH THE TEAM AT THE DATAI LANGKAWI BEEN LIKE AND WHAT SYNERGIES DID YOU DISCOVER?

As most of the buildings at The Datai Langkawi are made of wood, naturally, some of them need to be replaced over time. This is where I came into the picture and shared my knowledge with the resort's team on how to repurpose the waste wood. I also created an art programme called *Pieces of Datai*, that allows guests to create art from the wood waste. I love working with Remi Giromella and his team; we have the same vision for implementing holistic sustainable approaches in our organisations and spreading awareness to the public.

IN ADDITION TO WOOD PRODUCTION, YOU'RE ALSO THE FOUNDER OF MALAYSIA'S FIRST *PEFC-CERTIFIED HOMEWARE BRAND DAPO AS WELL AS ASIA'S FIRST PEFC-CERTIFIED FASHIONWEAR ACCESSORIES BRAND ORAN & BULA. HOW HAVE YOUR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT LINES BEEN RECEIVED BY CONSUMERS IN MALAYSIA AND BEYOND?

Our motto *Saving the World, One Piece at a Time* expresses our belief that each product we make - no matter how small - can contribute to supporting our environment. We had to overcome some initial reluctance in the market to make consumers understand why our products make more sense economically as well as in terms of sustainability, but we have gained a lot of support from our clients throughout the years and now export our products to more than 20 countries around the world.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, our exports were affected but thankfully the local demand has been overwhelmingly high. We are now engaging with investors to increase our capacity and reach. We believe that a sustainable business model can be profitable and at the same time contribute to making the world a better place.

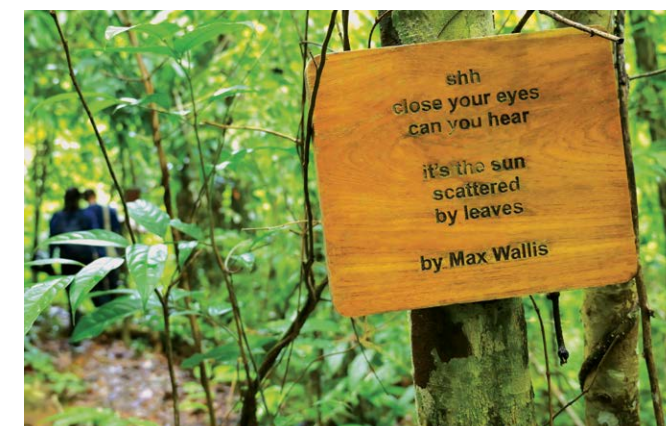
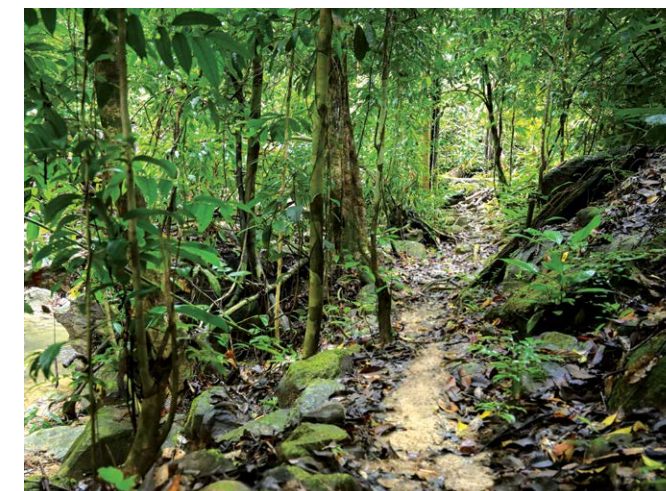
*PEFC (the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification)-Certified stands for products based on wood that are certified as coming from sustainably managed forests



VERSES IN THE JUNGLE

The new guided Poet's Trail experience at The Datai Langkawi offers guests the opportunity to find their own inspiration while exploring the property's verdant rainforest.

Naturalist and Nature Centre Manager Dev Abdullah with guests on the reopened Poet's Trail



While The Datai Langkawi is famed for its levels of service, its world-class dining and its luxurious accommodation, no visit to the property is complete without a foray into the 10-million-year-old rainforests that wreath the resort.

Home to a stunning array of flora and fauna ranging from 300–500 year-old Meranti Bumbung, Meranti Temak Nipis and Keruing Damar trees to Dusky Langurs, Great Hornbills, Sunda Colugos and shy mousedeer, and criss-crossed by pristine, flowing streams, the rainforests of Langkawi are truly mesmerising ecosystems and guests now have a new opportunity to explore them with the introduction of the Poet's Trail.

This new nature trek led by experienced resident naturalists from The Nature Centre (although guests can also venture into the jungle with their own map but are advised to inform The Nature Centre team beforehand), begins just beyond the resort's gates (but still within the hotel grounds) and includes a series of insightful poems by Max Wallis, Khalil Gibran and The Datai Langkawi Head Naturalist, Irshad Mobarak.

With 45- and 90-minute options, the new trail which commences in December 2021, offers guests of all skill and fitness levels a chance to commune with nature, while being inspired by poems that pay homage to the natural world and the rainforest's many mesmerising inhabitants.

The Poet's Trail joins a wide selection of guided and self-guided nature walks on offer at the resort. These include coastal explorations, butterfly adventures and canopy walks.

PROTECTING LANGKAWI'S AQUATIC JEWELS

One of the four pillars of The Datai Pledge, Fish for the Future is designed to protect and preserve the marine environment, while empowering local communities.

Langkawi is an island of staggering natural beauty. However, its picture-perfect landscapes are made up of sensitive ecosystems, including the reefs, bays and species within its fragile marine environment. Protecting these natural assets requires a careful balance between conservation and community, one that preserves the breeding grounds, the reefs and the water quality, while also ensuring a future for the island's fishermen.

With this task in mind, the Fish for the Future component of The Datai Pledge focuses on creating a balanced and sustainable ecosystem, one that caters to and benefits the natural world, local fisheries and tourism alike.

"With Fish for the Future, we are dedicated to reviving our underwater world through restoring the coral in the bay and making the beach as turtle-friendly as it once was," says Siva Prakash, Marine Biologist at The Datai Langkawi and Pillar Leader for Fish for the Future. "We hope that the results of our work bear fruit not just for today or tomorrow, but for years to come."



Smooth-Coated Otters at Datai Bay

© Sanjipaa Singh / jitspics.com

A key focus of the Fish for the Future pillar is the curbing of unsustainable fishing methods, which range from non-selective fishing equipment and the discarding of fishing equipment at sea, through to fishing over coral reefs. Not only are these practices harmful in the short term but they also reduce the environment's ability to regenerate, harming future generations.

One of the major new initiatives in the Fish for the Future pillar is to work with the Department of Fisheries and the Kedah state government to gain protected status for Datai Bay, so that its fragile reefs may be managed and protected.

Working hand in hand with these lobbying efforts is the development of artificial reefs. Following extensive studies on the marine life and ecological patterns of Datai Bay, in 2019 five purpose-built structures were deployed in the waters in front of the resort. These steel structures act as crucial aggregation points for a variety of adult fish, some of which have migrated from fringing reefs nearby, while also offering a protected settlement for coral larvae from adjacent reefs.

Following the deployment, the team at The Nature Centre has overseen the transplantation into Datai Bay of numerous coral frames and 300 rehabilitated coral nubbins from the resort's Coral Nursery, which had been damaged by storms or fishing nets and have been rehabilitated in saltwater tanks over three to six months. These efforts help boost the bay's coral population and in turn help maintain the health of the ecosystem as a whole. During regular underwater surveys and maintenance, the team has already seen a significant growth in coral and a proliferation of fish species around these structures.

However, The Datai Langkawi is not alone in this fight and the resort has partnered with non-profit conservation group MareCet to engage with

clockwise from top left:
Deployment of Artificial Reefs at Datai Bay; Siva, Pillar Leader, laying coral tripods with Fisheries Research Institute Batu Maung, Penang team at Teluk Datai; Clownfish in Anemone in Teluk Datai; Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin that visit Datai Bay.



© MareCet

the Langkawi fishing community to bolster awareness of sustainable fishing practices and marine biodiversity management, and support the group in their research and conservation efforts of the Indo Pacific Humpback Dolphin, a species threatened by pollution and overfishing. *Read more about MareCet's efforts in Datai Bay on page 40.*

In their work with local fishermen, they seek to educate local communities and school children on the importance of protecting the marine environment and of sustainable fishing practices. This effort is not about curbing the traditional fisheries of the island but to ensure it remains viable for generations to come. Fishermen are encouraged to fish around the artificial reefs using simple line and hook techniques, and will have the opportunity to sell the resulting catch to the resort's culinary team and guests, ensuring their livelihood. To date, 90 local head fishermen have participated in engagement sessions hosted by the Malaysian Department of Fisheries to promote these sustainable practices.



"As stakeholders trying to take care of the environment, it has fallen into our hands to educate the community on the vulnerability of our marine ecosystem and what will happen if we don't take care of our resources," says Siva. "The goal is to provide awareness but at the same time not to take away their right to those resources. If you can achieve that balance between conservation and the community, then we have a win-win situation without depriving someone of their livelihood."

The final component of the Fish for the Future pillar is a pair of unique adoption programmes. Adopt a Dolphin allows participants to adopt one of the mesmerising dolphins that are commonly spotted in the waters surrounding Langkawi and also Datai Bay, while Adopt a Coral allows guests and stakeholders to adopt a vulnerable coral that is being rehabilitated in the Coral Nursery. All proceeds of these programmes go towards supporting the efforts of The Datai Langkawi's NGO and social enterprise partners. ■

CALL OF THE DOLPHINS

As part of The Datai Pledge pillar Fish for the Future, which seeks to revitalise and protect Datai Bay's marine environment, The Datai Langkawi has partnered with marine research NGO MareCet.



Guests who have visited The Datai Langkawi will know how popular the resident pods of dolphins are. And studying their numbers as well as those of migratory whale species is Malaysian grassroots non-governmental organisation MareCet, which was founded in 2012 to engage in the conservation of marine mammals and their habitats in the country.

MareCet focuses its efforts on protecting porpoises, whales, dugongs, and dolphins - including the vulnerable Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins that often visit Datai Bay. To do this, Malaysia's first and only NGO dedicated to the conservation and research of marine mammals conducts research as well as outreach and awareness campaigns with the public, while also advocating sustainable conservation policies at a regional and national level.

Having recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of its Langkawi Dolphin Research Project (LDR), MareCet has partnered with The Datai Langkawi to help the efforts of The Datai Pledge's Fish for the Future pillar, which seeks to protect and manage the marine environment of Datai Bay and beyond. (Read more about Fish for the Future on pg 36).

"Datai Bay is easily one of the most beautiful corners of Malaysia, fronted by the emerald waters of the Straits of Malacca-Andaman Sea intersection and the towering uninhabited Thai island of Koh Tarutao, and backed by old-growth tropical rainforest teeming with bird life, small mammals and a myriad of insects and other herpetological creatures," says Marecet Chairperson, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Dr Louisa Ponnampalam. "Standing from the beach of powdery sand formed by years of eroded rocks, corals and seashells, one can have the pleasure of looking out at Anak Datai Island to the right, the oldest geological landmass of Malaysia, dating back to more than 500 millions years ago."

"Notwithstanding all the bountiful nature in and around

the bay itself, it is this geological fact that makes Datai Bay truly special, for it is the gateway to all that eventually came to be in what we see of the area today; an area teeming with healthy coral reefs that have developed resilience against turbid waters, dense schools of fish that make their living in the bay, mangrove-lined shores that help protect against the damage of bad storms, and probably a variety of other marine organisms that have yet to be documented in the area," says Dr Louisa.

Langkawi Dolphin Research is MareCet's flagship project and its first focusing on conservation-based cetacean research. MareCet's team of experienced researchers and marine biologists are interested in understanding the distribution, abundance, movement and ranging patterns of the region's dolphins, which include, for the purposes of the study, Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins, Irrawaddy Dolphins and Indo-Pacific Finless Porpoises, in both the waters of Langkawi and the coasts of Kedah and Perlis. In addition, the researchers want to shed light on the species' social structures, behaviours, and acoustic ecology and to better understand overlaps in human-dolphin interaction.

However, it's not just dolphins and porpoises getting all the attention. MareCet's WHALE Project, which was initiated in 2019, is Malaysia's first study of large whale diversity, distribution, abundance, movements and acoustic ecology. The study focuses on baleen whales - those that filter feed, including the Bryde's Whale - that are found around the Payar Archipelago and adjacent offshore waters.

The NGO uses the findings from its studies to better inform government policy making, elicit changes in regional conservation status and to help build sustainable relationships with communities in destinations like Langkawi. MareCet's efforts were instrumental in the recognition of Langkawi's waters as an IUCN Important Marine Mammal Area, while the research helps bolster the NGO's Sea, Science & Schools marine

education initiative, in which they share knowledge about marine animals with students and the public through school visits and social media.

"Two species of coastal cetaceans, namely the Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin and the Indo-Pacific Finless Porpoise call Langkawi home all year-round. Further offshore, the mighty Bryde's Whale roam around, feeding on the abundance of anchovies that Langkawi's waters bestow," says Dr Ponnampalam. "However, these animals are increasingly threatened by the many types of human activities that take place, including entanglement with fishing gear, impacts and entanglement from marine debris, vessel strikes, prey depletion due to overfishing, underwater noise pollution and harassment from boats and large marine vessels, as well as habitat degradation due to poor on-land waste management and coastal development. Since 2010, MareCet has been researching the cetaceans in Langkawi and we have come across many instances of dolphins with deep gashes and wounds on their bodies."

This is where the partnership with The Datai Langkawi comes in. Through its collaboration with The Datai Pledge and its Fish for the Future pillar, MareCet is raising awareness of the diversity and fragility of the marine environment of Langkawi to resort guests through a series of activities, including guided dolphin and porpoise watching cruises, marine talks and marine mammal lab sessions at The Nature Centre.

MareCet has also helped create The Datai Pledge's adoption scheme in which hotel guests can 'adopt' one of Langkawi's eight regularly sighted Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins, identified through the LDR project.



BEST PLACES TO SEE MARINE MAMMALS IN MALAYSIA

Satun-Langkawi Archipelago

The 99-island Langkawi Archipelago, which includes Datai Bay on Langkawi's northwest coast, is one of Malaysia's five Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), and part of the larger Satun-Langkawi Archipelago IMMA, as recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. It is populated with Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins, Indo-Pacific Finless Porpoises, Irrawaddy Dolphins and Bryde's Whales.

Perhentian Island

Located off the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, Perhentian Island is a popular scuba diving destination famed for its reef sharks and Green and Hawksbill Sea Turtle populations, but you can also spy Whale Sharks and Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins here.

The Mersing Archipelago

Situated off the east coast of the state of Johor, Peninsular Malaysia, this archipelago comprises 11 main islands and is an important habitat for Dugongs. The seagrass meadows surrounding Sibul and Tinggi islands provide one of the last sanctuaries for Dugongs in Peninsular Malaysia.

Matang Mangroves and Coastal Waters

Another of Malaysia's five IMMAs, the Matang Mangroves, located on Peninsular Malaysia's west coast south of Penang, are frequented by Indo-Pacific Finless Porpoises, Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins and Irrawaddy Dolphins.

Kuching Wetlands National Park

Surrounding Sarawak's Santubong Peninsular, Kuching Wetlands National Park is also home to a small Irrawaddy dolphin population. Also look out for crocodiles, otters, and water monitor lizards.

clockwise from top left:

Dr Ponnampalam and members of her MareCet team pictured here with The Datai Pledge team at The Nature Centre; Jol Ern, MareCet's Outreach and Education Coordinator, conducting a marine mammal-themed The Datai Pledge learning activity at The Datai Langkawi; A Bryde's Whale surfacing offshore in Langkawi, after gulping a large volume of water containing its anchovy prey



NOT YOUR AVERAGE GIFT SHOP

An intriguing retail concept, The Boutique at The Datai Langkawi offers an enhanced, interactive and curated journey through Malaysia's arts and craft scene.

From left to right: Retail Manager Yanti; The Boutique's products range from arts and crafts to daily essentials that are carefully selected; The Boutique is designed to be insightful and interactive

Once upon a time, you would be hard pressed to find a hotel without a gift shop. Usually hidden away in a corner of the lobby, hotel gift shops sold life's little (and often forgotten) essentials, but they offered little sense of place. However, The Boutique at The Datai Langkawi takes the hotel gift shop concept to a whole new level, with gallery-like levels of curation, interactive sessions with talented artisans, and a focus on products that bring the essence of Malaysia and its rich traditions to life.

"The Boutique provides discerning guests with the ultimate shopping experience, with product collections including both classic and modern clothing, accessories and footwear, an exclusive hand-picked selection of jewellery and even homeware items," says Retail Manager Norhayanti 'Yanti' Jamil, whose experience spans several leading luxury hospitality brands after she began her career helming The Datai Langkawi's original Gift Shop back in the year 2000. "At The Boutique, we proudly celebrate and promote artisanal products, especially items produced in Langkawi and around Malaysia. Items go through a detailed selection process before they are made available at The Boutique." Even ingredients are scrutinised to ensure they fit within the resort's core mission of protecting the environment, such as the sunscreen which does not damage coral as it is free of paraben, with no oxybenzones or octinoxates.

While The Boutique is in its essence still a retail concept, it is one that is instilled with the resort's passion for sustainability and Malaysian culture. The venue is home to a curated collection of high-quality, locally and regionally-produced gifts, resort essentials and objets d'art produced by talented Malaysian artisans and designers. Well-trained hosts promote Malaysian hospitality from the moment guests arrive at its doors by offering a hand-over-heart greeting and "Selamat Datang".

In addition to a fascinating selection of locally produced products, The Boutique's team is also on hand to elaborate and share insights into each product range, from the different types of batik and dyes used in clothing collections, to the traditional processes that have been preserved by today's artisans.

This unique interaction goes a step further at The Atelier, which showcases Malaysian talent through its 'Artist in Residence' series, which sees craftspeople from Langkawi and beyond visit the resort and offer guests an unprecedented insight into their traditions and art.

"Coming from a marketing background, it is all about storytelling to me," says Yanti. "What surprised me when I first came on board is that almost every item at The Boutique has its own unique and interesting story to share. From the beautiful selection of artisanal batik products and goods produced by tribes from East Malaysia, to handcrafted ceramics by Langkawi artists, each product has something to share with guests when they take them home."

Another key element of The Datai Langkawi, The Datai Pledge, is also showcased at The Boutique, where bespoke and upcycled products produced by local talents, NGOs and social enterprise partners are available for purchase.

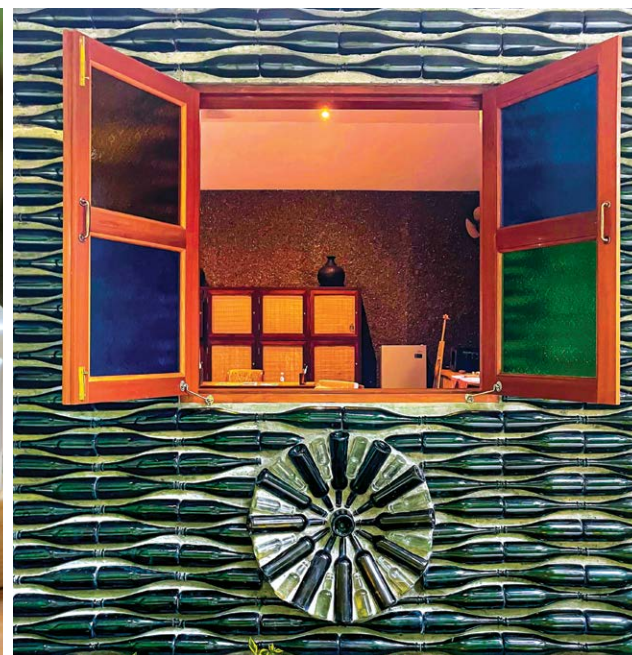
All proceeds from the sale of these items are allocated to The Datai Pledge funds and the nett amount is divided equally amongst the resort's selected NGO and social enterprise partners to fund their research, conservation and sustainability efforts.



left to right:
Remi Giromella,
Agus Rida' and
'Panjang' Tan
Kim Hock

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The Lab at The Datai Langkawi is a groundbreaking, interactive space designed to showcase and promote the resort's ambitious sustainability policies and activities.



You don't need to spend a long time at The Datai Langkawi to realise how important sustainability is to the identity of the resort. The property and its staff have declared it their mission to make as little an impact on the natural world as possible, thanks to a series of progressive sustainability initiatives that reduce waste, conserve resources and protect the environment as part of the hotel's 'zero waste to landfill' target.

Guests can experience this sustainable philosophy first-hand at The Lab, an interactive space that hosts workshops and activities, while showcasing sustainable products and construction methods.

A key component of Pure for the Future, a pillar of The Datai Pledge that focuses on the seven sustainability Rs - reduce, recover, recycle, repurpose, replace, return and rethink - The Lab represents a physical manifestation of The Datai Langkawi's sustainable endeavours and allows guests to join the resort staff on this exciting journey.

"Initially, the sustainability efforts of The Datai Langkawi were conducted at our small back-of-house Sorting Centre, where we sorted trash and crushed plastics and glass," says Remi Giromella, Quality Control & Improvement Manager at The Datai Langkawi. "However, I noticed that the team was always trying to figure out ways to upcycle this waste, to try to make new candles out of used ones, to liquidise used soap or to even create figurines out of used posters, plastic and cardboard. I realised that there was a need for a larger space, one in which the team could upcycle and experiment, and this gave birth to The Lab."

It didn't take long until Remi realised that such initiatives were not only of interest to the resort staff but also to guests. "A few guests started visiting the Sorting Centre and it occurred to me that this would be a great opportunity to involve our guests in our sustainability efforts by offering interactive workshops and showing them best practices they can carry forward into their lives at home. The result is The Lab, where the many sustainability activities we engage in come to life."

Not only does The Lab showcase all the efforts the resort's team makes to reduce waste and minimise its impact on the environment but its construction has been a vital component of that philosophy. The Lab has been constructed using 7,698 recycled champagne, wine, spirit, beer and drinking water bottles, all of which were consumed by guests and staff at The Datai Langkawi and then recycled as building materials. In addition to the Lab's striking glass bottle façade, the

floors and walls of the building feature 280kg of crushed plastic as well as 3,650 crushed glass bottles.

"I can honestly say that The Lab is the most complicated building that I have ever constructed because of its sustainable design and materials, the selection, quantity and quality of used bottles and upcycled materials, as well as the design motifs that were to represent The Datai Langkawi and its surrounding natural environment," says Agus Rida, Executive Director of Engineering at The Datai Langkawi.

"Using these unique materials and also incorporating design elements that represented The Datai Langkawi meant that we were constantly stepping back and re-evaluating and reviewing our work to ensure that the development was as sustainable as possible whilst also having that 'wow' factor for visitors. I'm very proud of what we achieved."

"Construction of The Lab was pretty straight forward compared to the other projects I've been involved with, including The Datai Estate Villa," says Tan Kim Hock, Project Director of Anespi Bina, which helped build the venue. "What was challenging and complicated was the finishing of The Lab, with the façade made from recycled bottles. We were totally unacquainted with this concept, but we were pleased to accept the challenge and are grateful for the new experience."

Future recycled bottles will be turned into concrete construction slabs and distributed to partner NGOs, while some waste materials will be recycled, including candles and slippers, and others upcycled and used by local artisans to create jewellery and gifts, some of which are available for purchase at The Boutique.

The Pure for the Future initiative has already helped reduce the resort's waste significantly and now up to 93% of waste is processed on site, saving over 493,000kg from making its mark on the island's landfills. More than 76,000 glass bottles have been recycled, as well as 6,800 candles, while 22 tonnes of fertiliser compost have been produced from food waste, the processes behind which can be seen at The Lab*.

"The Lab is the last piece of the upcycling puzzle where all the items, after being manufactured, shipped and consumed, are either recycled or upcycled, and later reused by guests (e.g. as candles) or by the local community (e.g. as footwear), following our sustainability vision and the circular economy concept," says Remi.

* all figures based on operations between March 2019 and July 2021



THE GREEN DREAM

With leaps in technology and innovation, hybrid and all-electric cars have now become a day-to-day reality.

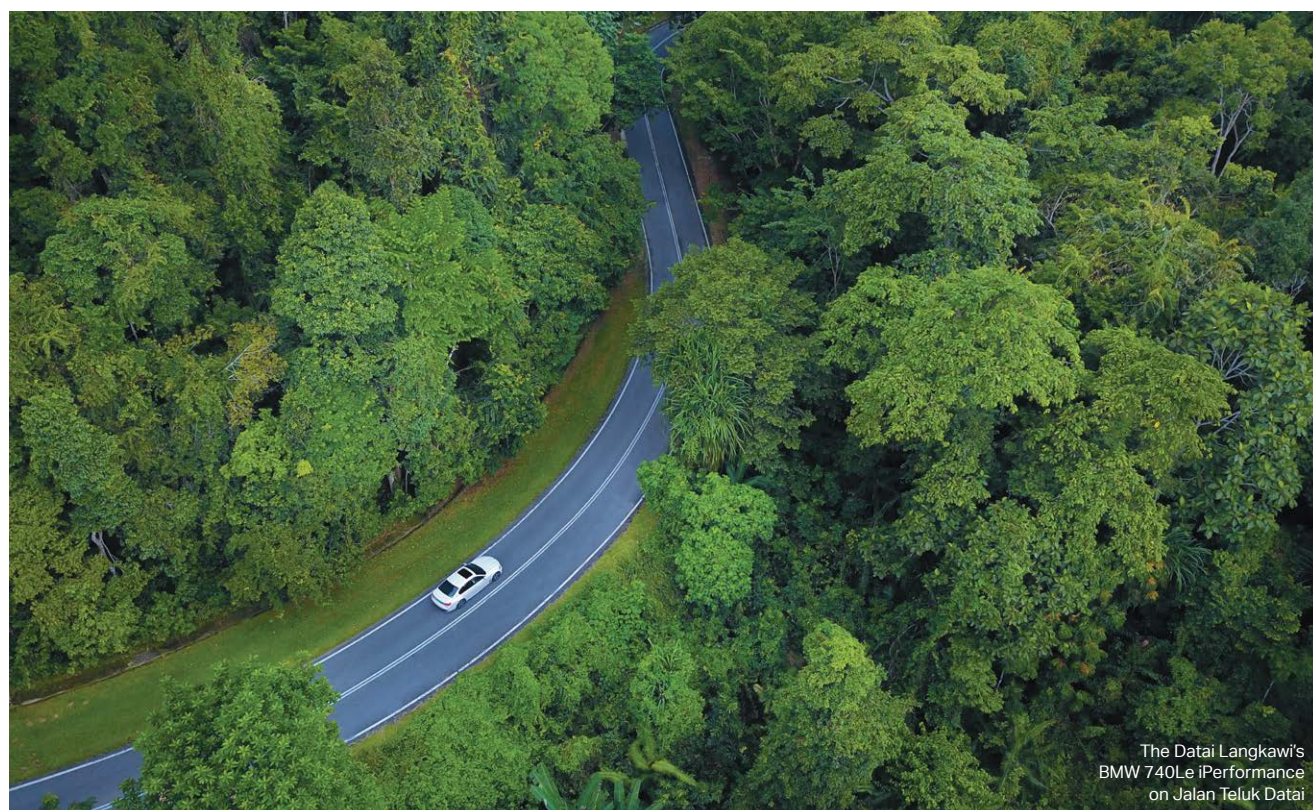
It's a little-known fact that during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, an all-electric BMW 1602e drove ahead of athletes competing in endurance events outside the main stadium. Silent as a whisper and with no local emissions, this graceful guardian was not only ideal as a support vehicle but was also a tantalising taste of what the future held for electric cars.

Fast forward through years of novelty and even ridicule – those poor first Prius drivers – and now hybrid electric and all-electric cars are not only embraced by the driving public but are increasingly edging out their fuel-guzzling competitors. While Tesla helped deliver some much-needed sex appeal to the electric car scene, other auto marques, from Toyota to Lamborghini, have created cutting-edge hybrid and all-electric models with ever-increasing ranges and ever-appealing affordability.

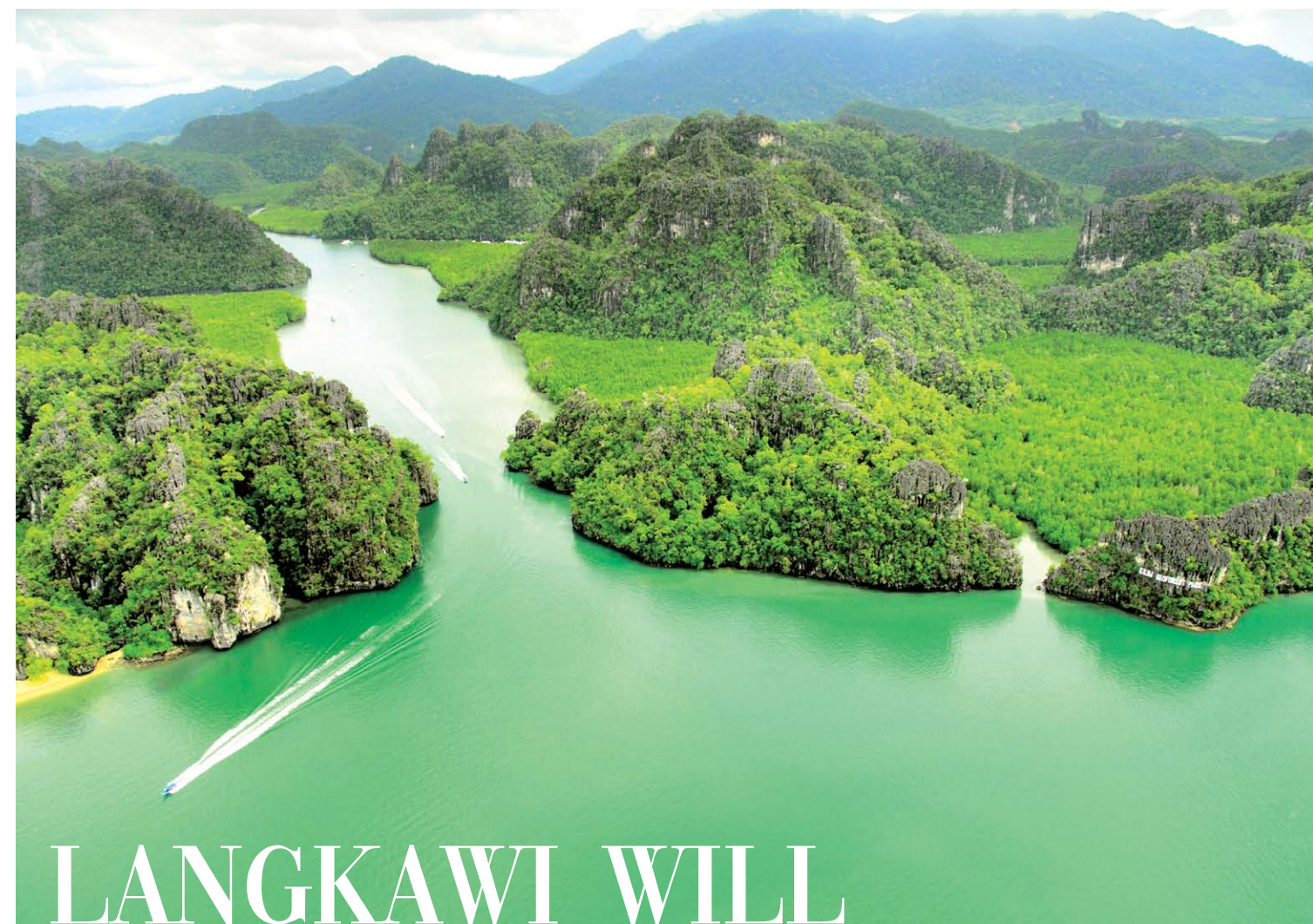
And the driving public are embracing what has become the biggest revolution in the auto industry since the Ford Model T. In the face of

growing interest from green-savvy consumers, global auto giants are already announcing plans to end the production of petrol and diesel cars – Volvo says 2030, General Motors predicts 2035 and Jaguar says it will have an electric-only line-up by 2025. With hybrid and all-electric cars on course to reach price parity with combustion models and the development of better charging infrastructure in urban centres, buying a hybrid or all-electric car will no longer be about making smart choices for the environment – it will simply make sense.

You might have noticed a few new additions to The Datai Langkawi's own fleet of cars. Ideally suited for the pristine environment of Langkawi Island the resort's range of vehicles now includes the sleek BMW 740Le iPerformance models, which combine the reliability of the marque's TwinPowerTurbo technology with an electronic motor. The new model offers a significant reduction in petrol consumption as well as emissions.



The Datai Langkawi's
BMW 740Le iPerformance
on Jalan Teluk Datai



LANGKAWI WILL ROCK YOUR WORLD

Home to the oldest rock formations in Southeast Asia, the UNESCO Global Geopark Langkawi is a thrilling step back into the often-turbulent history of our planet.

above:
Kilim Geoforest Park
forms part of the UNESCO
Global Geopark Langkawi

By the time you read this, we're sure you've become familiar with the beauty that is the Malaysian island of Langkawi. Famed for its towering peaks, ancient rainforest and pristine beaches, Langkawi is a popular destination with both international travellers and Malaysians alike. However, what makes the island truly unique isn't so readily recognisable. For guests of The Datai Langkawi, we will give you a hint: you're standing on it right now.

The ancient rock on which the island's many natural attributes sit is very special indeed, not just because of how old it is – would you believe more than 500 million years? – but also for its diversity of rock formations, rock types, fossils and limestone karsts that once made up part of the seafloor. It's these unique geological credentials that earned Langkawi the coveted position as Southeast Asia's very first UNESCO Global Geopark, making it one of only 169 in the world.



Established in 1998 as a means to recognise and conserve regions of the world that represent significant geological, biological and cultural heritage, UNESCO's Global Geoparks are the subject of sustainable development practices, education, research and responsible eco-tourism. Langkawi UNESCO Global Geopark, which encompasses the Langkawi archipelago's 99 islands (104 at low tide), is actually made up of a clutch of relevant sites - the Machincang Cambrian Geoforest Park, the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park, the Dayang Bunting Marble Geoforest Park, and Kubang Badak BioGeo Trail - making the island a hot spot not just for geologists but for any traveller interested in looking back in time.

So what makes Langkawi's rock formations so unique? The Langkawi archipelago represents the oldest and most complete geological record of the Palaeozoic era (252-541 million years ago) in Southeast Asia. Considered by many scientists as part of the ancient supercontinent of Gondwanaland, Langkawi's islands are awash with mountains, ridges, pinnacles, gorges, caves, hidden tunnels and mesmerising doline lakes. These formations can also be found beneath the surrounding seas, which are home to arches, tunnels and sea stacks.

Since the turbulent yet formative Cambrian period, Langkawi has seen it all, resulting in a unique collection of rock formations - including the deltaic sandstone peaks of the Machincang mountain range, the oldest in Southeast Asia - magnificent granite

cliffs, fascinating karst formations, limestone caves, and of course unique cold water fossils that allow researchers to peer far into the planet's past.

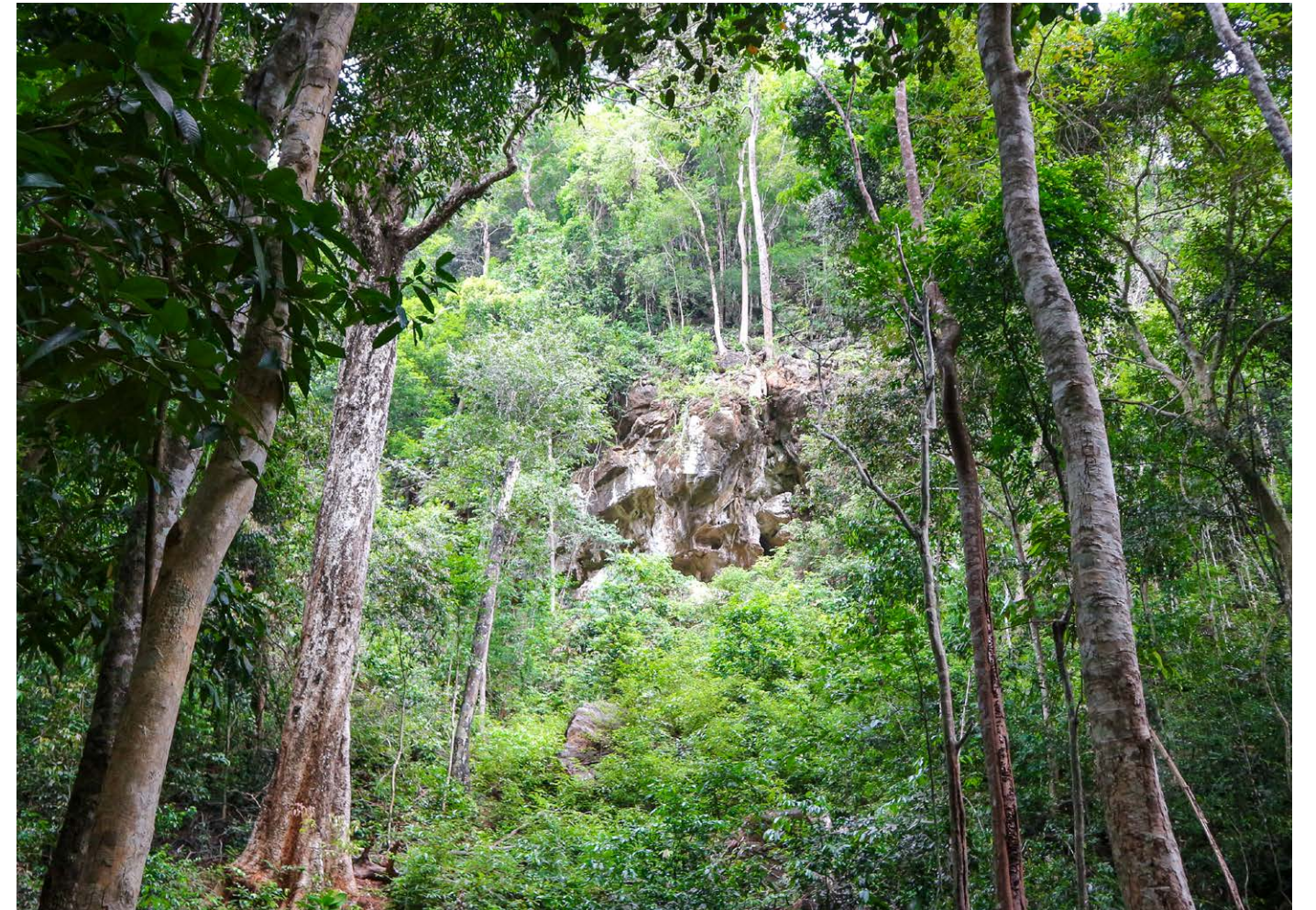
With over 90 geoheritage sites incorporated into the UNESCO Global Geopark Langkawi, travellers will have no shortage of attractions to seek out, from Mahsuri's Ring, a horseshoe-shaped ridge in the island's centre that was created by a 1.5-kilometre-wide meteorite; and islands that were uplifted from the depths of the ocean by surging tectonic plates; to rare mangrove forests perched above limestone bedrock; and sedimentary rock formations that tell a complete story of the Palaeozoic era.

Explore the mangrove forests, fossil beds and stalactites of the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park - a popular habitat for Langkawi's White Bellied Sea Eagles - by boat, or take the Sky Cab cable car to reach the spectacular 125-metre-long Langkawi Sky Bridge, which soars above the Machincang Cambrian Geoforest Park in the island's northwest. Visit the Oriental Village nearby and learn more about the UNESCO Global Geopark Langkawi at the Geopark Interpretive Centre before taking a dip in the seven pools of the Air Terjun Telaga Tujuh waterfall.

Alternatively, make for the Dayang Bunting Marble Geoforest Park, on Pulau Dayang Bunting, the archipelago's second largest island, which is famed for its freshwater lake - the Lake of the Pregnant Maiden - and some of the finest Permian marble formations in the world. ■

clockwise from top left:

Langkawi is a destination defined by its geology; visitors explore the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park by boat; the Langkawi Sky Bridge is a popular drawcard to the Machincang Cambrian Geoforest Park; the UNESCO Global Geopark Langkawi offers a diverse cross-section of ecosystems and landscapes.





clockwise from top left:
 The iconic Langkawi Sky Bridge soars above the Machincang Cambrian Geoforest Park; Can you spot Mat Chincang with the giant's turban, nose and chin facing the sky?; The Datai Langkawi is surrounded by soaring peaks.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

On an island with no shortage of myths and legends, one story has stood the test of time, perhaps because of its lofty position.

Of all the geological features found in the world, we love to weave stories about the creation of mountains, perhaps because of the way they dominate over the landscape. In Langkawi, the two tallest peaks - Gunung Raya, at 881-metres and 850-metre-high Gunung Machincang (where The Datai Langkawi is nestled) – have an origin story that has been passed down through the centuries.

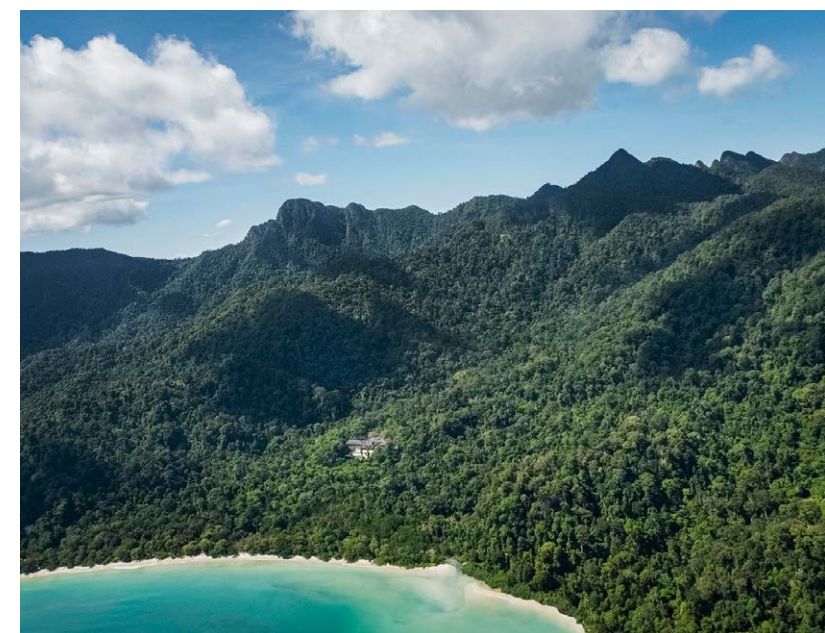
According to local legend, these two jungle-clad mountains were once a pair of giants named Mat Raya and Mat Chincang. The two were close friends, so close in fact that Mat Raya's son wed Mat Chincang's daughter. However, at the wedding reception the two giants fell out, reportedly because the groom was caught flirting with another maiden, and a brawl ensued, with the giants fighting and throwing items from the dinner table at each other.

The damage from this clash of Langkawi titans is said to have created a series of famous spots across Langkawi. Legend has it that a pot of gravy fell, with the spot where the crockery broke now called Kampung Belanga Pecah (loosely translated from Malay as 'broken crockery village'), and the gravy flowing to where Langkawi's largest town, Kuah (meaning 'gravy') now stands. Where the spillover soaked into the ground lies the village of Kisap (which means 'to seep in'), in Langkawi's east.

But the chaos didn't stop there. A pot of hot water was said to have landed where the village of Ayer Hangat (meaning 'hot water') now stands, home to the only salt water hot pools in Malaysia, with the rings of the pot forming Selat Cincin; the Straits of Rings that separate Langkawi from the Thai island of Tarutao (which is visible from The Datai Langkawi).

Mat Sawar, a guest at the wedding and a friend of the giants, is said to have tried to stop the commotion, and, wracked with regret, the two bickering fathers decided to punish themselves by transforming into Langkawi's two tallest peaks, with Mat Sawar, now the hill of Bukit Sawar, sitting between them, just in case the two decided to recommence their battle.

And in case you were wondering, Mat Raya's son learned his lesson and the couple lived happily ever after.



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TEA AND TIGERS

Once a popular hill station for heat-weary expats, the Cameron Highlands have flourished into one of Malaysia's most popular – and fertile – destinations.





clockwise from top left: Malayan tigers are thought to still live in region; the Cameron Highlands were originally settled by tea plantation owners; today the region is famed for the quality of its produce.

During the colonial period, the British had a knack for seeking out cooler climes in their most tropical outposts. In India, this led to the formation of hill stations like Darjeeling, Ponnundi and Chail, and in Sri Lanka to the building of towns like Nuwara Eliya. In Malaysia, merchants, diplomats and civil servants alike would retreat from the heat of the south to the Cameron Highlands, a tableland of mist-wreathed undulating peaks that reminded many of the lush lands of home.

Located in the state of Pahang, a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Kuala Lumpur, the Highlands were initially surveyed by government geologist and explorer Sir William Cameron in 1885 and tales of its temperate climate and verdant forests quickly reached the capital. Over the next few decades, orchards, plant nurseries and tea plantations were developed and by the 1930s, with the building of the first road into the region, Cameron Highlands became one of Malaysia's first tourism destinations.

Today, this glorious greenbelt continues to draw both local and international travellers looking for bucolic surrounds, a touch of colonial history and a respite from the heat of the lowlands.

If you, too, decide to venture into the Cameron Highlands, the region's tea plantations should be high on your list of attractions to visit. Cameron Highlands remains the largest

tea producing area in the country, with much of that production coming from the 3,237-hectare BOH Tea Plantation, which was founded in 1929 by British entrepreneur J.A. Russell and which produces over 4,000,000 kg of tea each year. The plantation, which specialises in Assam Manipuri and Rajghur teas, is home to a modern teahouse with stunning views across the rows of tea plants, where visitors can learn about the production process over a few rounds of the brand's signature brews.

Like the tea plantation owners, farmers and merchants quickly realised the Highland's potential as the fruit bowl of the country and much of the region is still under cultivation. There are great organic farms dotted throughout the Cameron Highlands, as well as larger scale estates and many have developed interactive experiences, including Taaju's Hill Strawberry Farm. Located in a misty valley, the farm is said to have the best strawberries in Malaysia and guests can visit for morning or afternoon tea, complete with scones, cream and strawberry jam, and also pick fresh fruit to take home.

If delving into nature is what you're after, the Cameron Highlands has a variety of ways you

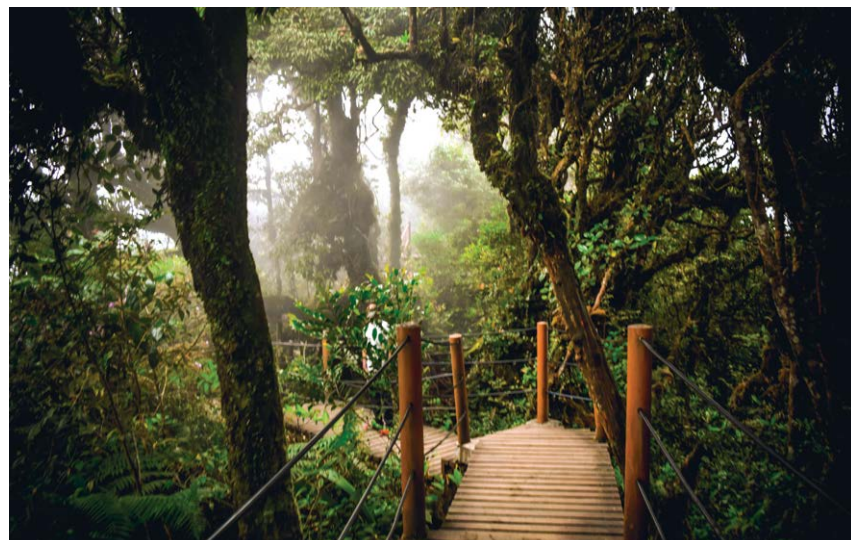
can get off the grid. Over a dozen colour-coded trails weave their way across the flanks of the region's eight peaks - which include the towering Mount Brinchang - with many leading to hidden waterfalls and viewing points. Be sure to visit the Mossy Forest, home to rare and endemic Malaysian mountain peacock-pheasants, Sumatran serows, and the famous Rafflesia flowering plant, and keep your eye open for sun bears, leopard cats, and even the endangered Malaysian tigers (locals will swear they've seen the elusive cats).

The forests of the Cameron Highlands have their fair share of secrets, including the fate of American businessman Jim Thompson. A former agent of the OSS (the forerunner to the CIA) who was instrumental in reviving the Thai silk industry, Thompson set out on Easter Sunday in 1967 for an afternoon hike and a spot of birdwatching. Despite being a regular twitcher and an accomplished outdoorsman, he was never seen again and his disappearance remains a drawcard to the Highlands today - was he murdered, kidnapped, picked up by helicopter for a secret mission or eaten by a tiger? History buffs can take the Jim Thompson Mystery Trail,

offered by the Cameron Highlands Resort, which traces the route the silk merchant was said to have taken before his disappearance.

The resort (which has a Jim Thompson suite) is one of a clutch of colonial-era retreats in the Highlands, rose bush-wreathed Tudor-esque houses of slumber that are popular with visitors looking to escape busy lives in the city, commune with nature, and delve into the region's colonial heritage. After a round at the picturesque Cameron Highlands Golf Course, head next door to The Smokehouse, a traditional English guest house with a tearoom and one of the area's best restaurants.

The colonial touch continues at Mrs Robertson's Rose Garden, a tranquil terraced Eden in Sungai Palas that boasts



clockwise from top left: The Cameron Highlands boasts many spectacular hiking trails; the legacy of the region's colonial history can be seen in its Tudor architecture; indigenous Orang Asli children.

more than 100 rose species – including Pink Queen Victoria and Maid of Hearts – as well as carnations, sunflowers and salmon hibiscus trees. There's a popular café serving local tea blends and a gift shop packed with rose-laced goodies.

Travellers with a green thumb will also love the Cameron Lavender Garden in Brinchang, another picture-perfect setting, complete with a popular café and a bee history gallery, and you can learn more about the important local bee population at the Ee Feng Gu Honey Bee Farm, one of several boutique local honey producers.

Of course, the British weren't the first to discover

the beauty of the Cameron Highlands, and visitors can explore the unique culture of the indigenous tribes, including the Temiah and the Mah Meri, at the Orang Asli (meaning 'original people' in Malay) village in the east of the Cameron Highlands. The Temiah tribe mostly live in villages nestled in the foothills of Tapah and guided visits offer a chance to try your hand at blow darting, participate in timeless dances and learn how the tribe has existed in this verdant landscape for centuries.

Nearby you can also learn about rituals and festivals of the indigenous tribes at the Mah Meri Art Gallery, which is dedicated to traditional and contemporary art and culture. ■

FAIRWAY HERO

Next time you're lining up an approach shot to one of the stunning greens at The Els Club Teluk Datai, spare a thought for the agronomy department, every golf course's unsung heroes.



At The Els Club, agronomy is the domain of Course Superintendent Ismahisham Ishak, known by the team and course regulars as 'Isa'. Langkawi born and bred, Isa, like many of his team members, has been connected to the course since its construction in 1989 and worked his way up from a construction driver's mate to head of agronomy.

What exactly is 'agronomy' you might ask. Essentially, it's the science and technology of developing and producing plants specifically for food, industry, recreation, or land restoration, and when it comes to The Els Club, it's all about ensuring optimum grass quality on playing surfaces – also known as turf management - and ensuring the course retains its high-ranking status in Southeast Asia.

Isa's is a fundamental but often under-appreciated role; he and his team (which represents approximately half the club's staff) start their days early for mowing of greens, arguably the most important playing surface in the golfing experience – get those TifEagle greens wrong and you're sure to have some unhappy golfers on your hands!

Like so many sciences, agronomy is a complex study that often depends on the interpretation and insight of

the Course Superintendent. A keen eye is required to see how different sections of the 24-hectare course are growing and to get ahead of potential problems. Dubbed the 'Rainforest Course', with pockets of differing microclimates, extensive shaded areas and heavy seasonal rainfall inhibiting grass growth; the course presents a unique set of challenges for agronomists, balancing the natural environment of the 10-million-year-old rainforest against the ideal conditions for growing grass.

Consequently, extensive planning is required when preparing the yearly maintenance program. Soil testing is carried out on an annual basis to determine the correct deployment of fertilisers, insecticides, and pesticides. This allows the team to map out 'cultural practices' – ranging from needle tining, sand top-dressing, verticutting, fertilisation and twice-yearly major maintenance of the greens and fairways - that are in sync with the seasons and various microclimates.

Additionally, in keeping with the core vision of The Datai Langkawi, which recently took over management of The Els Club Teluk Datai, Isa is developing practices and product usage that will allow the course to become more sustainable.



MY DATAI STORY

By Irshad Mobarak

I came to Langkawi as a tourist in March 1988. It was love at first sight, with its beautiful beaches, lush rainforest and wildlife that bowled me head over heels.

I have always been a nature boy from a very young age. I had a father who always took his children, all 11 of us, on camping trips to some of his most favourite haunts. As kids, we grew up in a home that was filled with animals both domestic and wild, and we all indulged in a lot of sports. As fate would have it, these childhood experiences were really preparing me for the day I would move to *the island* in September 1988, notwithstanding the five years spent as a banker in Kuala Lumpur.



The opportunity to work at The Datai Langkawi came up in 1993. I remember that day as clearly as if it was yesterday. While riding my motorbike to The Datai for my job interview, I thought to myself that I would only accept employment if I found the environment conducive with my values towards nature – I was going to be interviewing the hotel. But as I was nearing the hotel on the former coastal path, all my apprehension was soon removed when I saw in the sea a pod of more than 100 Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins moving along the same direction as me! I took this as a sign from the heavens above showing me that I should not worry and accept the job. Twenty eight years later and I am still at The Datai Langkawi.

Back then The Datai was 'the new kid on the block'. Many of the competing hoteliers had said that this hotel would never work; it was too far off from 'civilisation', situated in the middle of a jungle and much too far from the shopping areas. At night even the taxi drivers did not want to drive the long, quiet, dark and creepy jungle fringed road, believed by them to be filled with ghostly phenomenons of every imagination.

The Datai would prove the naysayers wrong, very

quickly they were made to eat humble pie. The hotel would fast become the top resort on the island, especially popular with Europeans and other international tourists. Nestled within an ancient rainforest and a sandy white beach that is gently kissed by the warm and azure waters of the Andaman Sea, it was just too beautiful to fail. It soon won many international accolades and hotel awards and would quickly become one of the top beach resorts in the world, making it the hotel of choice for several notable foreign dignitaries, actors and actresses.

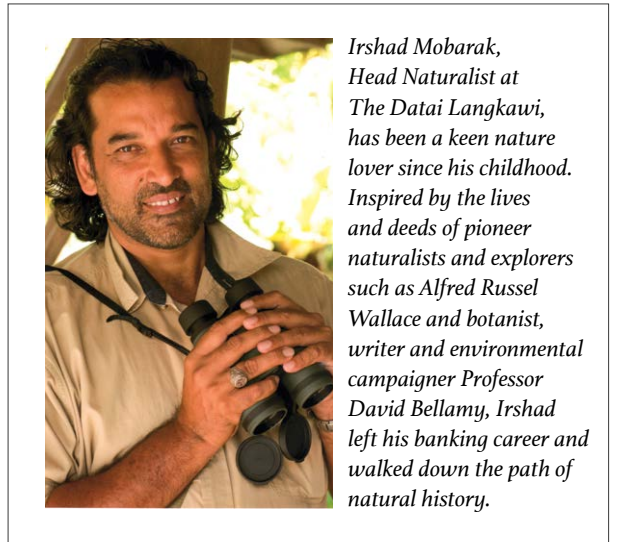
The one question I have often been asked by journalists is what are the changes that I have witnessed on the island in the more than 20 years that I have been here. Indeed, much has changed since I first set foot on the island. The image of a one main street 'cowboy town' of two rows of wooden shophouses with shaded five foot ways, has today made way for many more rows of concrete double and triple storey shophouses and shopping complexes. From a two lane road and a single traffic light island 33 years ago, Kuah today is served by a four lane highway leading all the way to the international airport with multiple traffic lights along the way. At Pantai Cenang, the same has happened, from a solitary 5-star beach

The spacious Nature Centre at The Datai Langkawi (Irshad's dream educational and activity centre), invites guests for educational talks and further exploration in the attached laboratory

resort and several backpacker accommodations, we now have rows of shophouses and restaurants of every kind lining both sides of the beachfront road. Many of the rice paddies around Cenang are slowly being replaced with homes, budget hotel accommodations, as well as boutique establishments.

About 10 years ago, the big boys of the hotel scene arrived on the island and at The Datai, we were no longer the new kid on block. We now had competition. The usual 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' motto no longer would work. Thankfully about seven years ago, The Datai became the property of Khazanah Nasional, under the management of Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels (TAR&H). Shortly after, we came under the skilful leadership of a new General Manager, Arnaud Girodon. Young, full of spirit and experience, he would not waste time. His competitive spirit was infectious and we knew that before we were to close the hotel for its first major refurbishment in almost 25 years, we needed to be number one again. With the fresh wind in our sails, we managed to quickly reach that goal.

The plans for The Datai's rebirth were immediately set in motion. Nature has been the biggest winner, from a one-man naturalist show, we now have a team of eight, made up of naturalists, botanist, marine biologists, receptionist. From a modest *kampung house* as nature centre (now upcycled as The Garden's permaculturist's office) to an amazing new and spacious Nature Centre with lounge, tea corner, reference library and even



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.

laboratory. From five nature activities in the past, we now offer over 25 specially curated nature based activities catering for all age groups including the very youngest of our guests. Not one to sit on its laurels, The Datai has implemented a comprehensive sustainability programme called The Datai Pledge. www.thedataipledge.org

We have indeed come a long way. The Datai has always been the shining leader on the island and it is continuously adapting to improve itself. The Datai experience is unique not only for our guests but also for those that have been given the privilege to serve a legendary brand. ■



GUARDIAN OF LANGKAWI

We speak with Head Naturalist Irshad Mobarak about his book 'Discovering Langkawi with Irshad Mobarak' and the 30-year journey that led to its publication.



YOU PUBLISHED YOUR FIRST BOOK IN 2016 BUT HAVE HAD A LOVE AFFAIR WITH LANGKAWI FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO FINALLY WRITE ABOUT THE ISLAND AND YOUR EXPERIENCES ON IT?

The island itself. The island's beautiful land, sea and nightscapes, its diverse ecosystems, each with their own unique flora and fauna was a story that needed to be told. There is no other island quite like it.

FOR GUESTS LESS FAMILIAR WITH LANGKAWI, WHAT DOES THE ISLAND OFFER THAT THEY WON'T FIND ELSEWHERE IN MALAYSIA?

No other island in Malaysia can offer the same diversity of geological formations, with stunning landscapes of sheer sandstone cliffs, limestone formations rising out of the ocean, caves, numerous islands, hidden coves, and secret waterfalls. There are also diverse flora types, ranging from lowland rainforest, forest on limestone, heath forest, littoral forest and mangrove forest to scenic rice paddies, along with its over 265 species of birds, 540 species of butterflies, over 50 species of mammals, and more than 60 species of reptiles. In the surrounding seas you'll find whales, dolphins and even whale sharks. There is no other island that can offer the budding or the seasoned naturalist the diversity Langkawi has to offer all in one place.

IF THERE'S ONE LESSON TO BE FOUND IN YOUR BOOK, WHAT IS IT?

The chapter on mangroves has an important lesson, where I touch on evolution, and I have tried to remove the misconceptions around the term 'Survival of the Fittest'.

YOU STARTED YOUR WORKING CAREER IN FINANCE BUT HAVE ALWAYS HAD A PASSION FOR THE NATURAL WORLD; WHICH NATURALISTS INSPIRED THIS LOVE OF NATURE?

There are two people that truly inspired me. The first person that played a pivotal role in inspiring and instilling the love and passion I have for the natural world was my father, who always took time to take his many children on trips into the great outdoors. My fondest memories are running barefoot in the jungles of Tasik Bera [in Pahang, Malaysia] with indigenous orang asli kids, swimming in the lake, paddling and racing in their dugout canoe or exploring the meandering passageways of the lake. I was also weaned on wildlife documentaries on television and influenced by the infectious presentation style of their host, the late David Bellamy.

YOUR BOOK NOT ONLY BRINGS THE ISLAND'S NATURAL WORLD,

MYTHOLOGY AND CULTURE TO LIFE, BUT ALSO DETAILS YOUR OWN JOURNEY; HOW HAVE YOU SEEN LANGKAWI CHANGE IN YOUR TIME ON THE ISLAND?

When I first arrived on the island 33 years ago, the population was a mere 38,000, and the infrastructure and facilities were just being upgraded in preparation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM); the road to the venue was being laid and the resort that this summit was going to be held at was a hive of final construction activity – it was to be the first five-star hotel on the island! The main entry point to the island was the modest ferry terminal in Kuah; the main town on the island. The new airport was also being upgraded to allow larger capacity planes to land.

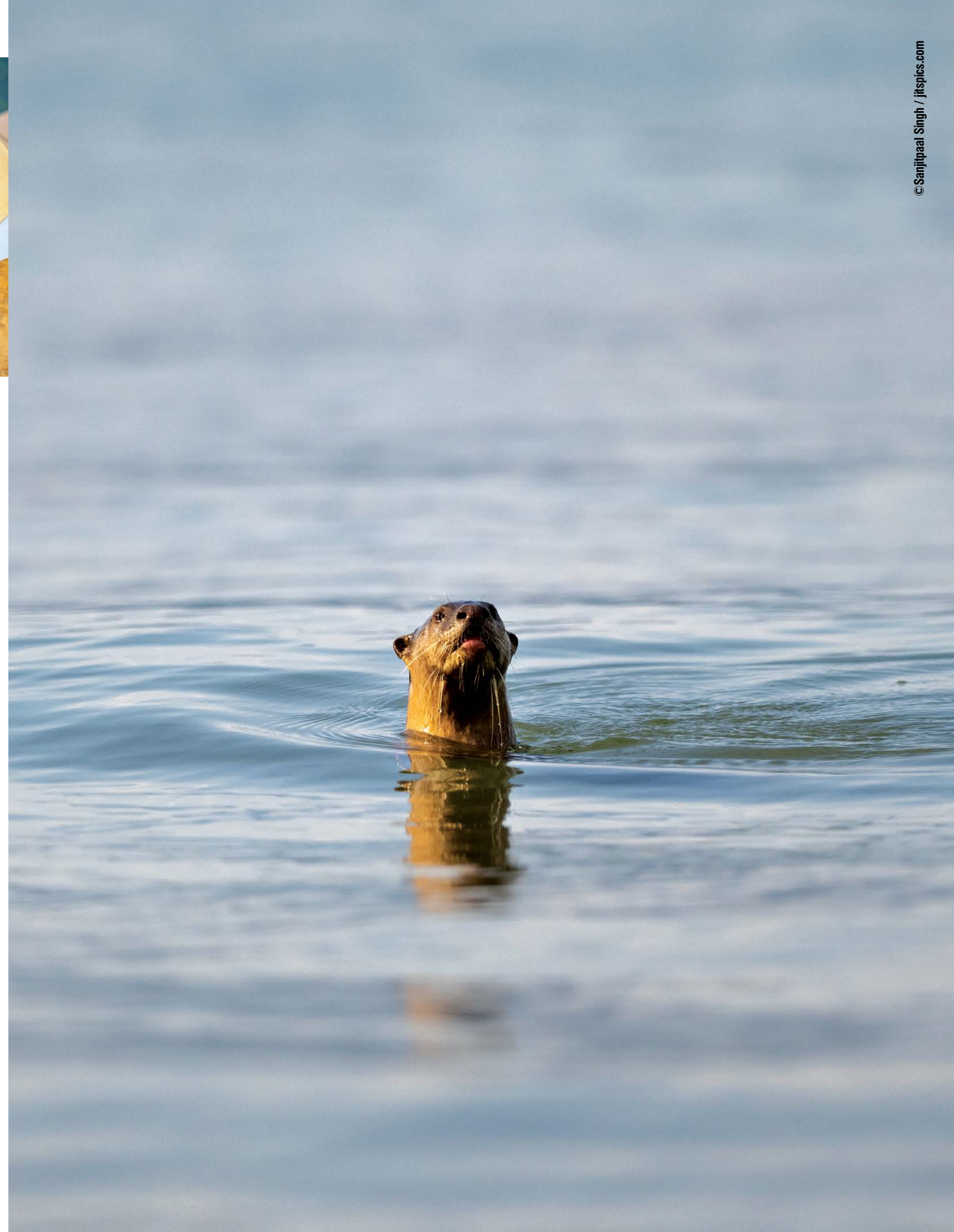
Today we have a population of over 120,000, most of which are employed in the tourism sector. While nature has to a certain extent been only slightly impacted, there have been intrusions and illegal encroachments into some of the natural areas. Habitat fragmentation, invasive plant species and the introduction of domestic animals are the main problems today and are issues that we, at The Datai Langkawi, are trying to address, specifically through our conservation programme, The Datai Pledge ([read more about this on pg 36](#)).

THE ENVIRONMENT OF LANGKAWI IS SOME OF THE MOST DIVERSE ON THE PLANET. TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU STRUCTURED THE BOOK AND WHICH SPECIES, OR ECOSYSTEMS MIGHT MAKE IT INTO A REPRINT OR A SECOND BOOK IN THE FUTURE.

No other island in the region can boast Langkawi's geological history. The entire geological history of Malaysia was played out here, resulting in a diverse succession of different rock or soil substrates being deposited, which in turn determined the flora and fauna that thrived here. In the next print, I would love to elaborate on this more and add a chapter on conservation issues and the solutions I propose.

IN ADDITION TO RUNNING A NATURE GUIDE BUSINESS, YOUR ROLE AS THE HEAD NATURALIST AT THE DATAI LANGKAWI AND AS AN AUTHOR, YOU'RE AN ADVOCATE ON CONSERVATION POLICY AND HAVE APPEARED IN SEVERAL DOCUMENTARIES. WHAT PROJECTS CAN WE EXPECT FROM YOU IN THE FUTURE?

I am grateful to the General Manager of The Datai Langkawi, Arnaud Girodon, for his untiring support to bring to fruition our conservation programme The Datai Pledge, where we address the many conservation and sustainability issues within our own footprint and strive to expand this program island-wide and even beyond.





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