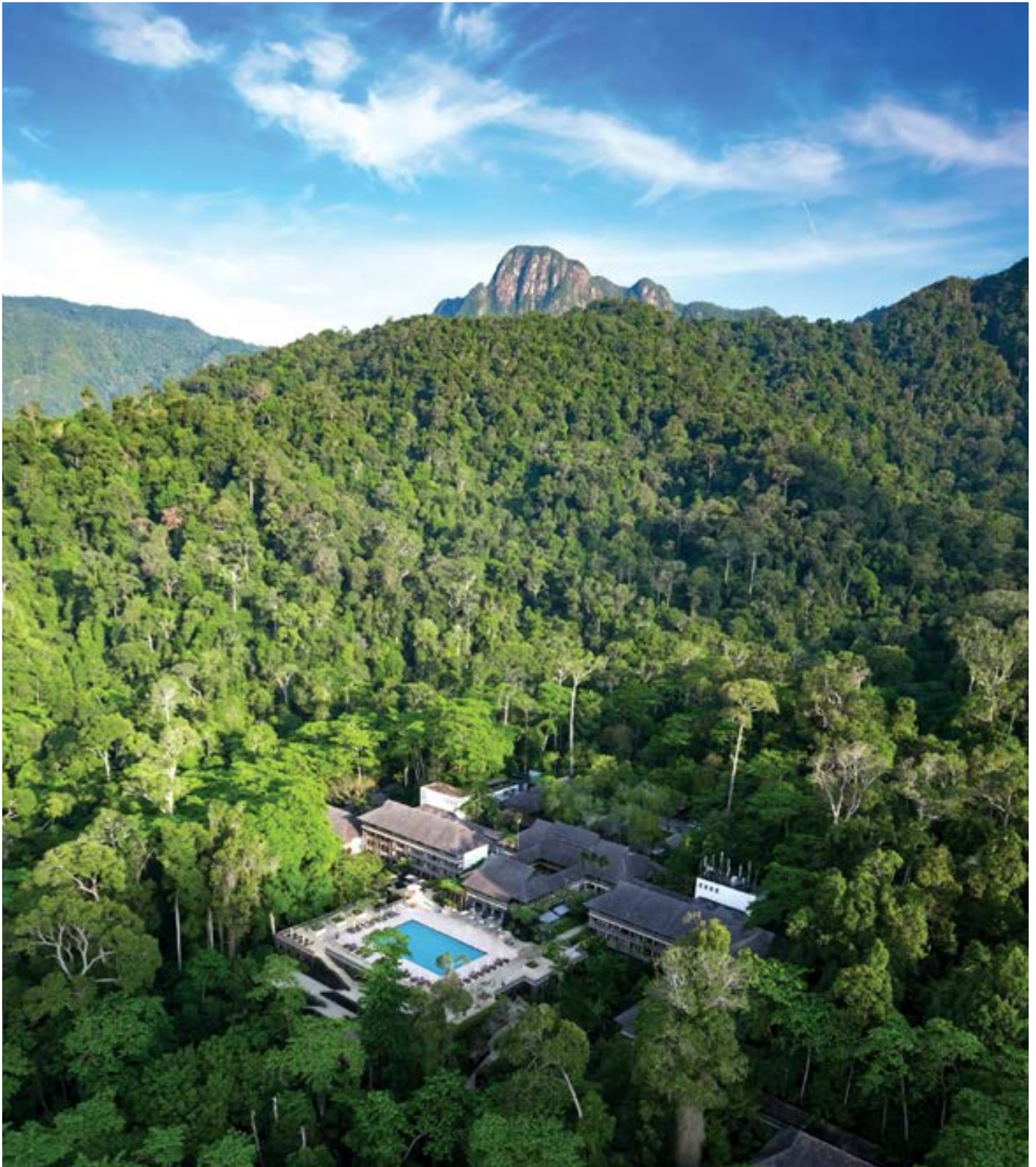


ISSUE #7

IKHILAS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DATAI LANGKAWI



IN THE KITCHEN
THE
CHEF SERIES
2022

CREATIVE MINDS
REFINED
RESORT
WEAR

NATURE
GIVING
SEA TURTLES A
FIGHTING CHANCE

THE DATAI PLEDGE
YOUTH
FOR THE
FUTURE



ALIA BASTAMAM





Welcome to another issue of IKHLAS, the last for what has been a year unlike any other. As you can imagine, it's been quite a season of ups and downs at The Datai Langkawi. However, we are thankful that we can celebrate another year, and invite so many of our regular guests to do so with us.

We could not have emerged from the pandemic as strong had it not been for the loyalty and support of our guests, especially our returnee guests, and I'd like to thank them all for their unwavering support, even from afar, and for coming back 'home' as soon as international border restrictions had eased. The care and concern shown through the difficult pandemic years have carried the team through some tough times and we are now back stronger than ever. We are thankful also for our 'new' guests, especially from across Malaysia, who have re-discovered our rainforest paradise located "right in their back-yard", so-to-say, and continue to return again and again. Your support has been encouraging and means so very much to all of us. We have much more in store for you next year.

In 2022 we welcomed a host of talented chefs to the resort as part of the coveted Chef Series. The Datai Langkawi saw six chefs strut their culinary stuff between January and October and, in a first for the Series, we had a lineup of Malaysia-only chefs, who showcased the diversity and innovation of the country's

gastronomic landscape. The lineup for The Chef Series 2023 will be just as exciting as we welcome a mix of international Michelin-star chefs and local culinary standouts beginning with chef Tom Aikens in December (*refer to pg 14*), so be sure to tune in to our social media channels for updates.

We're also looking forward to the premiere of our new Well-being Series, which will welcome a curated selection of wellness experts from around the globe to share their knowledge and insights into the world of holistic healing in our pristine setting between rainforest and sea.

Finally, 2023 marks The Datai Langkawi's 30th anniversary and to commemorate this momentous occasion, *Ikhlas* will have two special editions next year, dedicated to this important milestone and all that it represents. We will take time to reflect on the resort's beginnings, as a hospitality and sustainability trailblazer, and recognise the people who have made it what it is. Our people continue to be the resort's strongest assets, and we look forward to sharing their passion with you as we enter another year of important developments, innovations, and inspirations.


Arnaud Girodon
General Manager
The Datai Langkawi

IKHLAS

MAGAZINE

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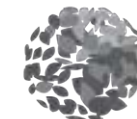
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Dusky Langur by
a Rainforest Villa

MAINTAINING POSITIVE MOMENTUM

The Datai Pledge Impact Reports allow guests and stakeholders the chance to see the results of the resort's comprehensive conservation and sustainability programmes.

With any complex process, it's important to take a step back and count your achievements, if only to give your efforts renewed direction. The Impact Report is a vital component of The Datai Pledge and its many initiatives because it allows guests, staff and stakeholders the chance to see what challenges have been overcome, what achievements have been made and what tasks are still to be tackled.

These comprehensive reports, the latest of which, 2021-2022, is over 100 pages, cover the efforts of The Datai Pledge since its launch in 2019, with the current release identifying significant measurable successes attained in key projects across all four pillars of The Datai Pledge in the past year, which had its own unique challenges.



"The Impact Report is of extreme importance to us and for many reasons; firstly, we wish to avoid being seen as 'greenwashing' – a practice many, many hotels worldwide unfortunately engage in. This report is an unambiguous statement of what we do throughout a year, with clear statistics documenting our work, and all information and figures are audited by independent accredited third party companies," says Arnaud Girodon, Executive Administrator of The Datai Pledge, and General Manager of The Datai Langkawi. "It, therefore, offers reassurance to our guests and partners. The Impact Report also shows what we wish to achieve in the future and lists down milestones, which offer a clear roadmap for us to follow and enable us to be more concise in our targets. It also shows guests, who we are, what we do, how we do it and where we are going or what's next."

Of course, this past year has not been without its challenges. "Faced with incessant travel restrictions, lockdowns and the temporary closure of the resort, our plans for the programme were severely impacted," says Arnaud. "It was largely owing to the strong spirit of collaboration that we were able to meet our core milestone targets and extend our network."

The team can celebrate plenty of wins during this difficult period.



clothing, slippers and books being donated to those in need; 170kg of food being delivered as part of the Covid-19 relief efforts; as well as a collaboration with 23 workshops operated by local artisans.

The Impact Report 2021-2022 not only reiterates the importance of The Datai Pledge, which strives to integrate conservation and sustainability into the business operations, company ethos and guest experience of The Datai Langkawi and future properties, but also details the milestones accomplished and the targets set for the four pillars (Pure For The Future, Fish For The Future, Wildlife For The Future, Youth For The Future – refer to page 36 for details) and the array of programmes and initiatives that sit under The Datai Pledge banner.

"The whole concept of travel has undergone a seismic shift," says Arnaud. "However, we have always believed that travel has the potential to be transformative; not only for the traveller but additionally, for the host community," adds Arnaud. "Having such an Impact Report available on our website, in guest rooms and sent to all partners worldwide, offers a comprehensive overview of what The Datai Pledge is all about and highlights our achievements, which hopefully will create more interest towards the Pledge and increase donations. Such support is essential for all the NGOs we have partnered with on our various special projects and will ultimately contribute to help protect Langkawi and the surrounding amazing biodiversity as well as the communities living within it.

Notable milestones include achieving zero-waste-to-the-landfill for the first time in December 2021 (with the resort striving to do so consistently since) and seeing the first turtle landing in Datai Bay in over 10 years, the result of efforts to make the beachfront more turtle-friendly (read more about this initiative on pg 34). The Datai Pledge has also seen the initial steps made to create a trans-island wildlife corridor – a potential world first – as well as the roll-out of vital educational initiatives, including through Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots Malaysia Award programme, RASMA.

Other highlights of this year's report include the development of five centres designed to achieve zero-waste for the resort's operations as well as to educate and aid collaboration: The Lab (built with over 7,900 glass bottles saved from the landfill), the Upcycling Centre, the Sorting Centre, the Bottling Plant, which produces drinking water for the property, and The Garden, which produced 430kg of herbs, fruit and vegetables in the time period covered by the report. In addition, community outreach programmes with SALAM, a local non-profit organisation, led to 10 single mothers and other beneficiaries being employed to upcycle slippers, fabric, and candles; three tonnes of



from left to right: Permaculture Garden at The Datai Langkawi, Deployment of Fish Aggregating Device in Datai Bay, Planting saplings from the Native Tree Nursery; Oriental Pied Hornbills; Upcycling Workshop at The Lab



HOLY GONGS

Once used to call the attention of the Gods, the Malay Gamelan is a ceremonial instrument that is used to welcome visitors from far and wide.

Travel for almost any length of time in Malaysia and you'll likely come across the Malay gamelan, one of the country's most iconic traditional instruments that traces its origins to the Javanese, Sundanese and Balinese of Indonesia. Often used at traditional festivals and formal events, the music of the gamelan begins with the very important sound of the gong, marking the beginning and the welcome, which is why you might hear the celebratory gong being sounded by our welcoming team when you arrive at The Datai Langkawi.

The gamelan was recognised as part of the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021. However, the story of the gamelan isn't quite as simple as that. It is said that the instrument was created by Sang Hyang Guru, the king of Java in AD 230, who ruled from high up on Mount Lawu. From such a lofty position, he needed a signal to summon the favour of the gods, so he created a series of gongs, thus forming the first gamelan set.

Brought to Malaysia by Javanese migrants in the 14th century, the gamelan takes its name from the Javanese word meaning beaten or struck, and often accompanies traditional puppet shows and dancers.

More a multi-timbre ensemble than an individual instrument, the gamelan is most commonly made up of a series of metallophones – metal bars that are struck with soft-tipped mallets – as well as a set of hand-played drums called *gendang* (or *kendang* in Indonesia) that



help keep the beat. With every region in Malaysia offering its signature traditional soundscape, these instruments might be joined by banana-shaped idiophones named *kemanak*, flutes crafted from bamboo, or the vocal accompaniment of female (*sindhen*) or male (*gerong*) singers.

You'll find the gamelan - now referred to as the Malay Gamelan - being played at palaces and government events, as well as at traditional weddings and gatherings (a local gamelan team from Langkawi often performs at The Gulai House during special occasions). The result is a welcoming and serenading soundscape that subtly changes with the region and the stories of its people.



RETURN OF THE LOCAL TALENT



Despite a career that has taken him across Malaysia and beyond, Chef Jais finds himself drawn back to Langkawi. Now he heads up the authentic Malay cuisine at The Gulai House as Chef de Cuisine.

Often, we travel far and wide only to find ourselves returning to our roots. So it is with Chef Jais, a native of Kedah, the state in which Langkawi is located, who has enjoyed an extensive culinary career spanning more than 30 years, with stints at leading hotels across Malaysia and Singapore. He recently returned to Langkawi to head up the authentic Malay cuisine at The Datai Langkawi's acclaimed Malay restaurant The Gulai House.

"I grew up in a very poor part of Kedah and while I've been away a long time, it will always be home for me," says the chef as he enjoys a tea break on a busy afternoon preparing for dinner service at the restaurant. He admits he was first inspired to cook by his parents, who prepared authentic Malay cuisine at home.

"I was born into a 'cooking family' because my mum and my dad both liked to cook. In Kedah, when we celebrate wedding ceremonies and other important community events, we call everyone together to cook. That usually means the men come together to cook as a group. Watching the community come together over food definitely inspired me from an early age."

Chef Jais went on to work his way up the career ladder at hotels across Malaysia, including the Pan Pacific in Kuala Lumpur, the Parkroyal in Penang, and various Berjaya Hotels, including in Langkawi. He also opened the restaurant 1 Market by Chef Wan in Singapore and worked his way up from

Banquet Chef to Chef de Cuisine, being VP of Fairmont Hotels' Halal Committee, before relocating to eastern Malaysia. "I love Sabah," says the chef dreamily. "I spent 10 years there and still own property there. It's a very special part of Malaysia."

However, his move to Langkawi is more than just a homecoming for the chef; he was part of the team at the original Gulai House, which first opened in 1998 and was located at the far end of Datai Bay (in 2002, he was also charged with opening Gulai House Carcosa Sri Negara in Kuala Lumpur). A decidedly traditional Malay restaurant, The Gulai House won critical acclaim from across Malaysia and beyond for its preservation of authentic Malay dishes, a reputation Jais will maintain at The Datai Langkawi.

"From its inception, The Gulai House really helped introduce genuine Malay cuisine to foreigners as well as to many Malaysians," says Chef Jais. "Now, we continue this important mission at The Datai Langkawi, using the freshest ingredients and timeless techniques."

"For me, Malay food is more about technical cooking – some dishes take hours of preparation and even longer to cook and that's where passion and patience helps because there are long processes required to create authentic dishes. Unlike Western dishes that can use similar sauces, every Malay dish is unique. I want our guests to try the recipes of our mothers and our grandmothers, the culinary heritage of Malaysia and the cooking methods of the country. It's a chance for them to step back in time to savour the food of our people."

The chef admits that The Gulai House's modern presentation of Malay cuisine helps make its timeless dishes more approachable to guests, though. "My style of Malaysian cuisine is quite modern, and I believe year on year we need to innovate and adapt flavours and presentations for the diner. Traditionally, cuisine from Kedah is quite intense and spicy but I realise that we need to meet the palates of our guests. Any food culture should incorporate its original roots and adhere to traditional techniques and



from top:
Sup Ketam Wangian Serai Titik (crab soup with lemongrass); Signature Itik Seranti Gulai Kawah Kundur Kampung (Kedahan duck curry with winter melon)



ingredients, but from there we can try to find a balance that ensures diners don't have to leave their comfort zone too much to enjoy it – there's no point cooking exactly as my mother did if no one will eat it!"

To create his authentic dishes, Chef Jais relies heavily on the bounty of the resort's Permaculture Garden, from which he sources ingredients fundamental to Malay cuisine, including garlic, ginger, shallots, lemongrass, ginger flower and of course, turmeric.

"Almost every good Malay dish features fresh turmeric; it's so important and so good for you," says Chef Jais.

The chef's favourites from The Gulai House's new menu include the Sup Ketam Wangian Serai Titik, freshly pressed crab soup with lemongrass; and Kari Ikan Tenggiri Turun Temurun, a mackerel fish curry with okra, eggplant, and tomatoes from the original restaurant's menu. "This is the most authentic dish on the menu and one that won the original Gulai House many awards."

Other chef recommendations include the traditional Kedahan duck curry with fresh winter melon; Pangkal Ekor Asam Berasap, slow-cooked oxtail with chilli and browned coconut paste; and Ubi Kayu Nyior Matang Nisan Tebu, Pandan Gula Hangus, sweet tapioca and grated young coconut with caramelized sugarcane and pandan brulee. "This is a very old-school recipe and the only change we have made is the presentation," says Chef Jais. "The older people don't worry so much about presentation though; they just want it to taste great!"

CLASSIC COOKING MEETS HAUTE CUISINE

British chef Tom Aikens will present his creative European dishes at The Datai Langkawi in December 2022, to kick off The Chef Series 2023.

“My mother and father first opened my eyes to the infinite pleasures food can bring,” says Tom Aikens. The acclaimed chef showed an interest in food early on; making cakes, bread, jams and chutney with his mother, Tania, and twin brother, Robert, while his wine merchant father taught him terroir later on.

When his father accidentally booked the family into a Michelin-starred restaurant in France, Aikens began to consider a career in food. “The waiters lifting cloche after cloche of frog legs, snails, foie gras, sweetbread... for a 12-year-old boy, it was an unforgettable experience. I was spellbound,” he recalls.

Like most young chefs starting out, Aikens had a tough start in the kitchen, working 18-hour days at The Cavalier in



London, then labouring just as hard at Pierre Koffmann’s three Michelin-starred restaurant La Tante Claire (The Aunt Claire) in the early 90s before joining the two Michelin-starred restaurant Pied à Terre team as a sous chef in 1993. He later swapped London for Paris to work for culinary legend Joël Robuchon and returned to Pied à Terre in 1996, topping Marco Pierre White to become the youngest British chef to win two Michelin stars at 26. While Koffmann taught him the art of simplicity and how to create extraordinary dishes with just a few ingredients, he was similarly inspired by Robuchon’s complex dish preparation; Aikens’ cooking style is a heady amalgamation of these two mentors.

Opened in 2020, his current restaurant, one Michelin-starred Muse by Tom Aikens in London’s Belgravia, has just 23 covers, with plates inspired by memories of Tom’s childhood and his haute cuisine heritage: ‘a snail-paced life’ is simply snails, garlic and red wine, while ‘strawberry fields forever’ is just yogurt, basil and berries.

Aikens has established a solid presence overseas, with three eateries in Abu Dhabi, Mediterranean restaurant Alba, steakhouse The Oak Room and all-day dining restaurant, Market. Expanding his global footprint further, he recently opened The Jade Room + Garden Terrace in Tokyo, where the menu is a heady fusion of Japanese and Western flavours - think squid consommé with yuzu, chicken, and confit lemon; and fire-roasted charred celeriac carpaccio with truffle.

Passionate about locally-sourced, sustainable produce - his second book, Fish, highlights the need for responsible fishing - diners can expect a truly inventive menu as Aikens puts his own distinctive twist on Malaysian cuisine, when he visits The Datai Langkawi at the end of 2022.



HOME GROWN HERO



Promoting heritage Malaysian cuisine with menus based on age-old family recipes, **Chef Azli Ahmad**, formerly of OpenHouse in Kuala Lumpur, took diners on a whirlwind tour of the country's foodscape earlier this year as part of The Chef Series 2022.



Having recently partnered with heritage preservation organisation Jabatan Warisan Negara (Department of National Heritage) in Kuala Lumpur to revive long-forgotten recipes on the verge of extinction, Chef Azli Ahmad is as much a historian and preservationist, as he is a cook. Many of his dishes showcase hard-to-come-by ingredients, which he procures through his partnership with small-scale village producers, often in remote locations.

After stints at kitchens in South Africa – a highlight was cooking for the then-Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when he visited Lesotho, Africa in 2003 – Chef Azli returned to Malaysia in 2006 and has since championed recipes handed down by mothers and grandmothers through the generations.

An ode to forgotten flavours, his menu, presented at The Datai Langkawi as part of The Chef Series 2022, elevated Malaysian cuisine into a fine dining experience, while transporting diners back in time to Malaysia's traditional foodscape. Chef Azli hosted his event at The Datai Langkawi's authentic Malaysian restaurant, The Gulai House. Built in kampung style and situated in the midst of lush rainforest, guests dined surrounded by the sounds of the jungle.

Chef Azli says he was "truly delighted" to participate in the recent Chef Series, elaborating that he is currently focused on reintroducing traditional Malaysian dishes to a new audience. "Partnering with Jabatan Warisan Negara, we've revived almost extinct recipes and nationally gazetted dishes for diners. With access to more than 200 recipes from their archive, my team and I bought some of these recipes for The Datai Langkawi's The Chef Series event."

"Some of the ingredients are from our jungles and we work closely with the villagers and *Orang Asli* (indigenous people of Malaysia) to source these



unusual and hard-to-find items for our dishes. The menu was a taste of the past brought to the present, with a focus on elevating local cuisine into a finer dining experience," says the chef.

Highlights from his gastronomic delve into the archives included Sup Gamat, a soup made with sea cucumber, chicken stock, mushroom and ginger, using lemongrass from The Datai Langkawi's Permaculture Garden. Main course options included Kambing Masak Buah Ara, a slow-cooked chicken with local figs, coconut milk, lemongrass, galangal and spices, while the meal concluded with a trio of traditional desserts, including Ubi Kelempong: slow-cooked tapioca with caramelised sugar cane.

clockwise from left:

Chef Azli Ahmad presented authentic Malay cuisine in the traditional surrounds of The Gulai House; dishes included in his menu for The Datai Langkawi were Kerabu Umbut Kelapa (Young coconut pith with shrimp paste), a trio of Entrees including prawns, thick fish curry and slow-cooked lamb or chicken, and a trio of desserts including slow-cooked tapioca in sugar cane, glutinous rice, and the 'king of bananas' with coconut milk, palm sugar and sago; Chef Azli Ahmad in his element, explaining his cuisine to diners at The Gulai House



ELEVATING FAMILIAR FLAVOURS

Never one to settle on convention, Beta and Skillet's Chef Raymond Tham brought his passion for bold flavours to The Datai Langkawi during The Chef Series 2022.

Dynamic, innovative, and edgy, Chef Raymond's take on Malaysian food pushes culinary boundaries, transforming familiar flavours into a new representation of modern cuisine. Dishes of the menu at Beta, one of three restaurants of which Tham is co-founder and Executive Chef, include mouth-watering scallops with fern, habanero and calamansi (a local citrus fruit), while Skillet's degustation menu showcases a daring liver pâté with Madras curry and cherry.

A cook with a big passion for food from an early age - he knew he wanted to run restaurants from the age of six - chef Tham graduated from one of the oldest culinary colleges, Westminster Kingsway College, London, which was founded by gastronomic icons Auguste Escoffier and César Ritz. He then trained under Pascal Cialdella, currently Executive Pastry Chef at The Peninsula Tokyo, himself the disciple of Jean Jun, a one-time finalist at the prestigious Meilleurs Ouvriers de France. He's also worked overseas, cooking in restaurants in London and Bermuda.

After working as a chocolatier and teaching culinary arts at KDU University College, Malaysia, Tham finally realised his childhood dream, establishing his first restaurant, the European-influenced Skillet, located steps from Kuala Lumpur's iconic Petronas Twin Towers. He then opened Beta, which focuses on a modern interpretation of Malaysian cuisine and



more recently opened Burnt & Co at Artisan Playground by Cookhouse.

During his visit to The Datai Langkawi, Chef Tham's culinary extravaganza began with traditional snacks including *keluak*, the fruit of the kepayang tree used as a spice; baby corn, glutinous rice, peanut and anchovies and fresh bread served with an anchovy emulsion. The meal was complemented by the stunning setting of The Dining Room, which is wreathed by a 10 million year old rainforest, with views of the Andaman Sea from the open-air terrace.

This was quickly followed by a playful appetiser, Shima-aji paired with tropical caviar, guava, The Datai's own Gin and kaffir lime. A trio of main courses followed: Crab with custard and torched ginger flower; duck with yam, soy curd, and duck floss; and Koji lamb rack with roasted garlic, which was thoughtfully paired with a Jasper Hill Shiraz packed with berry fruits, pomegranate and mint notes.

Pre-pudding, diners sipped a heady blend of rice wine, soursop and Jicama vinegar before digging into a dessert of chocolate with palm sugar, which was paired with a glass of Offley port or black tea made with spices, ginger, and orange blossom.



clockwise from left: Chef Raymond Tham's dinner as part of The Chef Series was an indulgent experience; a cooking demo at the beach brought a first taste of Chef Tham's creations to guests; the menu included: Sea vs Land Cucumber, Koji lamb rack, and Andaman Crab.

CLASSIC FRENCH COOKING

Embracing a nose-to-tail approach, Chef **Masashi Horiuchi** of Kuala Lumpur's fine-dining restaurant Entier captured imaginations during his showcase for The Chef Series 2022.



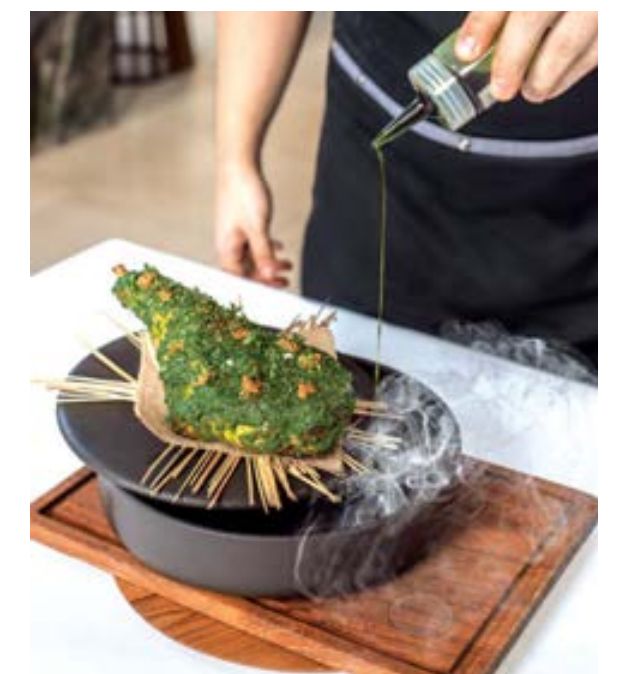
Acclaimed for the precision of his technique and the integrity of the cuisine he serves at his fine-dining restaurant Entier, Chef Masashi recently visited The Datai Langkawi where he presented his signature take on creative French fare, one that emphasises local seasonal produce with elegance and finesse.

At Entier, menu highlights include roasted stuffed whole pigeon; foie gras and beetroot puree; and Bone Marrow & Flank - bone marrow roasted in a special Jospier oven and served with flank steak tartare, sliced potato crisp and black truffle.

Before setting up his own restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, the Fukuoka native spent two decades working in kitchens overseas, including a five-year stint as Sous Chef at two-Michelin starred L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in London. He's also worked alongside Antoine Westermann and Georges Blanc, both of whom own restaurants boasting three Michelin stars.

The venue for this refined culinary experience was The Dining Room, which is surrounded by beautiful rainforest and boasts views over the Andaman Sea out to Tarutao Island. Chef Masashi's meal was a wonderfully extravagant affair, beginning with five elements: Corn with a custard cornet and matcha; a Spanish mussel tarte with eschalots confit; Tanjung Malim caviar with horseradish cream beignet; duck rillettes with foie gras and beetroot pickles; and Iwagaki rock oysters with caviar, pomelo, and ox tail broth.

His dish Gobo, which saw Japanese Gobo ice-cream paired with caviar, was followed by the likes of cured Scottish salmon with sorrel sauce and salmon roe. Dessert was the simply-titled Strawberry: a Chitose strawberry lime tartare, with mint mousse, red berries and strawberry ice cream.



clockwise from left: Chef Masashi Horiuchi in The Datai Langkawi's Permaculture Garden, gathering herbs and spices for his eclectic menu; dishes of the evening included Lobster & Vadouvan; the chef preparing his signature lamb leg; Chef Masashi Horiuchi plating the appetizers.

CHAMPIONING LOCAL INGREDIENTS

Chef Lee and Chef Yong of Kuala Lumpur's Eat and Cook presented the sixth and last event in the 'Eclectic Malaysia' edition of The Datai Langkawi's The Chef Series.



clockwise from left: Chef Lee and Chef Yong are two dynamic new stars in Malaysia's cuisine scene; the menu included such dishes as Local Wild Caught Tiger Prawn; Chef Lee employs precision technique in plating their dishes; Wild Caught Grouper was another dish of the eclectic menu, as well as a trio of starters consisting of Puri (deep-fried bread), Rojak, and Dabai Boom - a dirty Martini.



At their restaurant Eat and Cook, the country's first Malaysian-style omakase, chefs Lee Zhe Xi and Soh Yong Zhi express their creativity with seasonal produce sourced from rural pockets of Malaysia. Their imaginative dishes have already made an impression within Asia's gourmards; they came 81st in 2022's round-up of Asia's 100 Best Restaurants and received a 'One to Watch' award from Asia's 50 Best Restaurants.

Chef Lee places great emphasis on respecting ingredients, while Chef Yong's cooking philosophy is influenced by Japanese craftsmanship, with each dish meticulously prepared in pursuit of perfection. Their food philosophies are jointly expressed on Eat and Cook's menu, with dishes like wild octopus with Kicap chili and chayote leaf, and aged Ipoh duck served with a glaze made from *buah keluak*; a popular ingredient in Peranakan cuisine, the fermented pangium seed is earthy and slightly bitter and adds depth of flavour to dishes.

During their recent visit to The Datai Langkawi, the duo thrilled guests with a thought-inspiring approach to local cuisine, in keeping with 2022's Eclectic Malaysian theme of The Chef Series. Their dining experience began with a pair of heady cocktails – the Dirty *Dabai Martini*, and *Rojak*, a

spicy and sour Mezcal concoction, with the intriguingly titled Ice-Cream with Salad- *budu*, or fermented fish, ice-cream served with pickled shallots, cured fish roe, latok, steamed okra, roasted eggplant, and herbs from the resort's gardens, a fascinating first salvo. This was the perfect first dish for the setting of the resort's fine dining venue The Dining Room, which is surrounded by ancient rainforest and overlooks the Andaman Sea, with views out to Tarutao Island in Thailand.

This was followed by coconut smoked fish in a fresh coconut herb broth laced with lemongrass, chilli oil and *belimbing*, a Malaysian sour fruit, and local wild-caught tiger prawn, served with tomato chilli jam, crispy capers, and a prawn shell foam.

For mains, diners could choose from The Duck - Ichiyaboshi Penang duck with yams, preserved vegetables, sour cabbage and plum sauce – or Wild Caught Grouper, which was grilled in banana leaves, and served with dried clam and oyster aioli, a dish the hotel's sommeliers paired with a Fume Blanc from the Adelaide Hills. Diners then savoured Chili and Kantan meringue or Pineapple Tart with Banana Madeline and Kerabu Mango Macaron.



A POET'S PERSISTENCE

Château Ausone is one of the most famous wineries of the Bordeaux Saint-Émilion region, where it produces world-class vintages fit for a Roman scholar.



Wine lovers will know Château Ausone not only as a stalwart of tradition and quality, but also as one of only two Premier Grand Cru classified producers in Saint-Émilion, in Nouvelle-Aquitaine in southwestern France. Located on the Right Bank of the Bordeaux wine region, the winery's elevated southeast-facing vineyards have been producing superb wines since the 18th century, although it's thought that wine has been produced on the site for far longer and that today's Château is situated on the site of the sprawling estate of Roman poet, scholar, and wine lover, Decimus Magnus Ausonius, for whom the winery is named.

Château Ausone ages its wines in the ancient maze of limestone caves and tunnels beneath the Château, formed during centuries of quarry work and which also boast ancient Christian art, including an underground rotunda with a fresco of the Last Judgement. The Château is best known for wines that have been described by Master of Wine James Lawther as "reticent and reserved in youth". With just 7 hectares of vines set across intimate terraces, Château Ausone is the definition of a small producer

(only 2,000 cases per year) and enjoys a microclimate created by sheltered vineyards, generous sunshine, fertile limestone and clay soil, and the proximity of the Dordogne and Isle rivers.

Today, the winery – which has majority Cabernet Franc planted along with Merlot – is led by Alain Vauthier, the incumbent of a family line that reaches back to before the French Revolution. He has spent the last decade renovating and innovating this ancient producer of fresh and elegant Bordeaux wine. The winemaker is now experimenting with Cabernet Franc clones as well as varieties of Petit Verdot and has made movements towards biodynamic production, meaning no chemicals have been used in the production of its fine wines since 2008. Just as grapes were grown on the site centuries ago. In addition, the winery's infrastructure has been lovingly refurbished, with a 13th-century chapel, wreathed by verdant vines, now beautifully restored and a pair of 18th-century cellar houses overhauled.

Cellar Master Philippe Baillarguet, with input from consultant oenologist Michel Rolland, creates wines (available at The Dining Room at The Datai Langkawi), that are unlike most others in the region. In addition to the presence of minerality from the abundant limestone, the wines present rich, full-bodied Cabernet Franc profiles, as well as exquisitely balanced, round and pure Merlot profiles, with ripe tannins, intoxicating aromatics, touches of liquorice and complex dark fruits.





THE TRANSCENDENT TALENT

Now based in Langkawi, Malaysian artist Skaii de Vega creates works inspired by her own reflections on life, society, and our place in the universe.



Nature is often an influential muse for artists, and for Malaysian painter and sculptor Skaii de Vega, it's both a canvas and an inspiration. Working with oils for her paintings as well as driftwood, glass, semi-precious stones and more for her sculptures, Skaii developed her captivating style in Belgium and during a 2018 apprenticeship with master painter Semyon Bilmes in Maui, Hawaii. She then returned to the country of her birth to immerse herself in the natural splendour of Langkawi.

Skaii, a self-taught artist who began painting in 2011, is best known for her surrealistic images and sculptures, the latter of which are often crafted using reclaimed materials, with inspiration coming from meditation and dreams. To seek out these visions, which sit between Freudian and Jungian philosophies, and which are both surrealistic and visionary, Skaii transcends her own consciousness, reflecting on her perceptions of life, on societal norms and the universe at large, manifesting physicality in relation to pre-conceived expectations.

In doing so, the artist and author, winner of the Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media, Belgium, 'Emerging Artist' prize in 2016 as well as the Visual Art Open, UK 'Emerging Artist Prize' in 2017, hopes to tell the humanistic story of awakenings, evolution, and metamorphosis through a mixture of archetypal symbolism and transcendence towards a higher purpose.

More than 20 of Skaii's pieces are currently held in private collections in Belgium, Switzerland, the US, Spain, and Turkey. Visitors to The Datai Langkawi can explore her atelier on the island to experience her bold and imaginative works, many of which have an environmental and conservation message to them.

Beyond her artistic endeavours, Skaii is also deeply involved in the Kanshalife Project, a pioneering, community-driven sustainability and artistic space in Langkawi that works closely with The Datai Pledge as part of the Pure For The Future pillar initiatives.

KAPTEN BATIK MARINA 22' COLLECTION

For Summer 2022, Kapten Batik aspires to dive into the world of "Marina".



Unlike their past collection, the Marina 22' is sophisticatedly designed to bring tranquillity to life, to remind us of those times of staring at the ocean while searching for inner strength and heal one's own fragility.

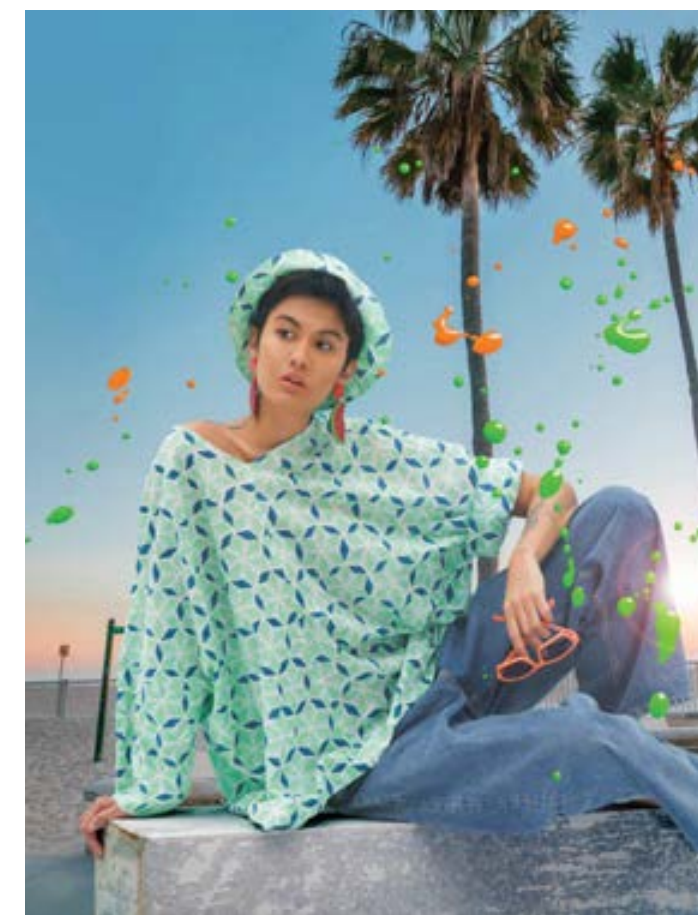
Blended together with dauntless, prominent prints, the collection utilizes Kapten Batik's enigmatic prints that encapsulate the beauty of the ocean, reflecting the ocean's tender caress of the shoreline in a never ending dance of courting.

Connect with Kapten Batik as the brand embarks upon a new journey to sail through the Marina's magical and spectral world.

As Kapten Batik continues on their journey through the enchanting underwater world, Marina is the ideal concept to foster the ideology of "to conserve, to sustain" whilst benefiting all.

Marina, derived from the Latin word "marinus" [transl. of or pertaining to the sea]. Fascinated by the quiet shores and palm-fringed beaches in Malaysia, as a locally-established business, it is Kapten Batik's utmost honour to present the Marina collection as an admiration to our nation, home to the most stunning beaches in Asia.

The Marina'22 collection represents exquisite designs that render the beautiful and pristine ocean with soothing and peaceful vibes. There is a saying: "dance with the waves, move with the sea, let the rhythm of the water set your soul free". This drives Kapten Batik to work on artistry ideas with an overwhelming admiration for the ocean.





REFINED RESORT WEAR

Acclaimed Malaysian fashion designer **Alia Bastamam** found peace and inspiration for her latest collection at The Datai Langkawi.

From tracing the shapes in *Vogue Patterns* as a child to designing and making dresses and handbags for friends as a teenager, fashion has always played a big part in designer Alia Bastamam's life. Bagging 'Brand of the Year' and 'Decade of Excellence' titles at the inaugural KL Fashion Awards 2021, and the coveted 'Designer of the Year Award' at KL Fashion Week back in 2017, her labels Alia Bastamam and Alia B are amongst Malaysia's most eminent fashion brands.

Initially focusing on made-to-measure garments and bridal wear when she established the brand in 2010, Alia found her niche creating luxury ready-to-wear pieces as well as resort wear. Given Alia's expertise in the world of resort wear and her background of having previously collaborated with everyone from Havaianas to hijab brand Naelofar, teaming up with the designer for a specially curated collection made perfect sense for The Datai Langkawi. The result is Alia Bastamam x The Datai Langkawi, a colourful, six-piece capsule collection that incorporates naturalistic prints including water lilies, waves, and butterflies into its designs.

The capsule collection is part of Alia's Resort 2023 collection, aptly titled 'Oasis', and the designer explains that her inspiration for the new line is a woman on a journey to find solitude and beauty in her own oasis.



"With so much happening in our fast-paced world today, sometimes we forget to connect with ourselves," says Alia. "In creating this collection, I imagined my Alia Bastamam woman in her place of paradise where she can escape to rest her body and soul." The designer elaborates on her vision of the oasis: "I pictured her escaping a dry, chaotic landscape and into this utopia of lush greens, flowing streams of water and the echoing sounds of nature."

"It's not only an oasis in the physical sense but also the emotional," she adds. "In a sense, it's a place she can be free, liberated from any constraints; a place she can just be."

The idea of an oasis is imagined with outfits fit for desert queens and princesses, with earth tones spotted with bouquets of chartreuse and rose. Elsewhere, there are majestic kaftans in snow white, soft flowing drapes, wraps to accentuate romance and femininity, and plenty of Alia's signature pleats.

A modern-day oasis itself, the lush surrounds of The Datai Langkawi offered plenty of stimulus for the

clockwise from left: Alia Bastamam is an acclaimed Malaysian fashion designer; Malaysian TV presenter Marion Caunter in Alia Bastamam at The Datai Langkawi; the Waves of Datai bay fishtail kaftan and shirt dress of the Alia Bastamam x The Datai Langkawi capsule collection

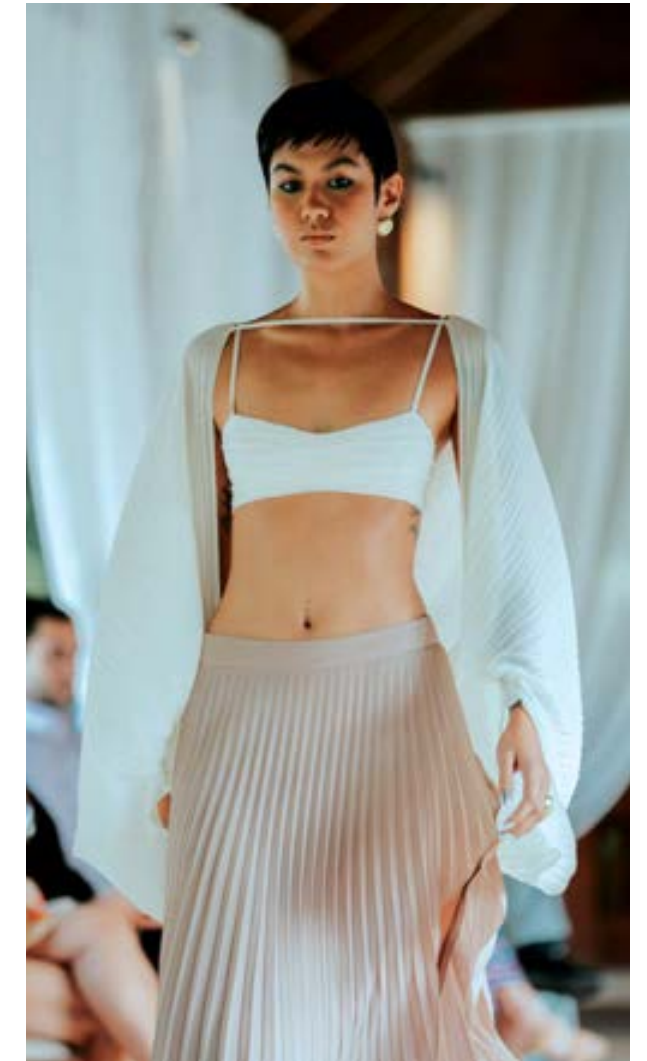


from left:
Alia Bastamam x The Datai Langkawi - Waterlily shirt and pleated skirt, the butterfly walk dress; Models walking in the fashion show launching the Resort '23 collection by Alia Bastamam which was held at The Datai Langkawi with select VIPs attending the star-studded event.



designer, with Alia's signature designs reimaged in custom prints informed by the resort's pristine surroundings. From its iconic pond of lilies upon arrival to the calming waves of Datai Bay, inspiration was everywhere. Alia also incorporated the Butterfly Walk, an open-concept garden with nectar plants designed to attract these winged beauties, into the collection, and the secret Crystal Creek, located a short distance from the hotel, where guests can cool off in a river amid the lush greenery of the forest.

When she first visited The Datai Langkawi, the designer fell in love with the resort immediately. "Each time I come back, it feels more and more like home," she adds. Creating designs while immersed in nature helped fuel her imagination. "I had a great experience creating these pieces that were inspired by my time here. Surrounded by the lush nature, and with a well-rested mind and body, it was really a joy working on this project."



Once the collection was ready, Alia returned to the resort with photographers and a hair and beauty team for a stunning photoshoot on the shores of the Andaman Sea that captured the garments in all their glory. In addition to beach shots, models posed on the resort's iconic Grand Staircase and next to the waterlily pond for a dramatic series of images that captured the designer's inspiration as a backdrop to the final designs.

Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi, says that the resort appreciated the opportunity to enter the world of luxury fashion through this brand partnership. "We've thoroughly enjoyed this collaboration with Alia Bastamam and her team and are proud of the pieces that have resulted from it, including the waterlily print, the designs inspired by the crashing waves of Datai Bay, and an elegant dress with touches of our butterfly garden. I'm happy to count Alia among our returning guests, and it's been exciting to see how she has translated the beauty of our location into the incomparable pieces of our capsule collection, Alia Bastamam x The Datai Langkawi." ■



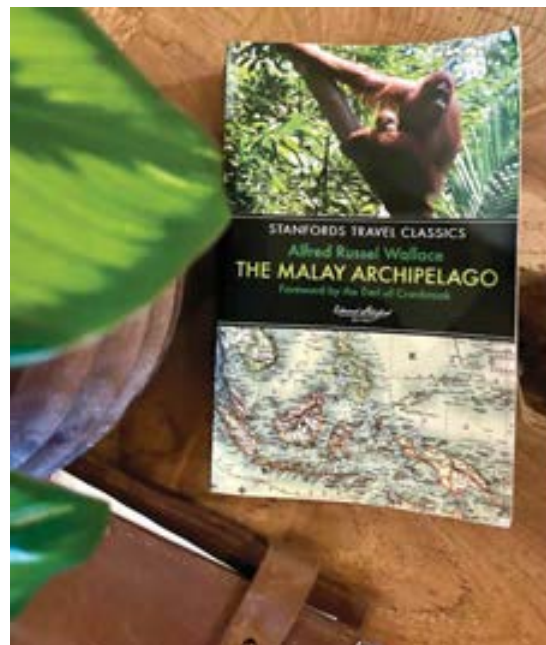
DISCOVERING AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY

Under the arched bamboo of The Datai Langkawi's The Nature Centre, Juliet Kinsman gets an exciting and enlightening history lesson and the true story of how the theory of evolution and natural selection really came about.

I have many friends who spill with fond family holiday memories of time at The Datai Langkawi. They'll regale you with descriptions of long walks along the always-empty pristine beach or watching sunset with a cocktail after their best ever spa treatment. My stand-out recollection is a little different.

It's of precious time spent, feet in the soft white sand, sitting with renowned Langkawi naturalist Irshad Mobarak, overlooking the ancient rainforest. Irshad reminded me all that we think we know about history can often be just that — his story — a popularised version of one narrative which isn't necessarily representative. Brace yourself: it may not have been Charles Darwin who first formulated this world-famous theory. It was the naturalist and explorer Alfred Russel Wallace, born in a Welsh village in 1823, I discover after a wildlife hike, here on this award-winning crescent of beach.

The Nature Centre at The Datai Langkawi is a compelling hub for nature



enthusiasts and environmentalists. In between pointing out rare hornbills and blue kingfishers, Irshad's tales also bring to life forgotten pages of history. While there is no evidence Wallace passed through these exact coordinates near the Andamans, there's no better location to learn about the 19th-century trailblazer.

Credited as the founder of biogeography, Wallace's name is rarely acknowledged outside the wing of the British museum that carries his name, or beyond the flora-fauna boundary that runs between Bali and Lombok, in Indonesia. 'Darwinism' is a household term, yet few know much about the man whose name inspired that of the Wallacea region.

Darwin had been barking up the right trees with his nascent natural selection theories back



An Advisor to The Datai Pledge, Juliet Kinsman is also Sustainability Editor for Condé Nast Traveller (a first for the magazine) and the Founder of eco-travel website Bouteco. With a journalism career that spans three decades Juliet has an unrivalled understanding of which of the world's best hotels are most eco-friendly. During her time as Founding editor of Mr & Mrs Smith and as an author of Louis Vuitton City Guides, she recognises the real meaning of luxury is spending time in beautiful environments, and her 2020 book *The Green Edit: Travel, Easy Tips for the Eco-Friendly Traveller* is the ideal guide to making travel a stronger force for good.



in England but academics investigating that era concur that over in this hemisphere, the younger, less well-known naturalist, was most likely, a few steps ahead.

Wallace pieced together a theory of evolution from his own self-funded expeditions. It was lying in a malaria-induced state in a thatched bamboo and stone house in Indonesia's Maluku Islands that Wallace had his 'a-ha moment'. From scrutinising the zoogeographically uniqueness of this part of the world, the penny from his research dropped: he twigged that species change from one into another, over time. In the competition for life, it dawned that it was the strongest who survived.

"Because Charles Darwin was part of the establishment, he was a fellow of the best institutions and he had the best access to teachers," explains Irshad. And when Wallace posted off an essay presenting his ideas to Darwin, chances are the latter was nervous that he was about to be academically upstaged. The elder scholar put together his version of what would be a game-changing hypothesis, and *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* was published in 1859, resulting in Darwin and Wallace to be considered co-founders of the Theory of Evolution.

Irshad has spent much time tracing Wallace's steps and making pilgrimages to where the explorer wrote his first papers, and it's as though his spirit resides here with us in Langkawi. As I sit not far from super-sized stick insects and golden birdwing butterflies akin to those that wowed Wallace in the Moluccas, as the islands were known, Irshad and I honour the author of *The Malay Archipelago*. Wallace's magnum opus endures as one of the greatest natural-history narratives of all time. And in turn, The Datai Langkawi's own master storyteller shared with me one of the most exciting epics I've ever heard.



GIVING SEA TURTLES A FIGHTING CHANCE

As part of the Fish For The Future pillar of The Datai Pledge, the team at The Nature Centre have constructed a beachfront hatchery that they hope will bolster the numbers of turtles visiting Langkawi.



When you next walk along the beach at The Datai Langkawi, you might want to keep a keen eye out for signs of nesting turtles. While turtle sightings on the west coast of Malaysia are relatively rare (especially compared to the east coast), increased conservation efforts are turning the tide on local population numbers. Most importantly, turtles need to be encouraged to nest in Langkawi, which means their young will return to do the same, and that's where the team at the resort comes in: Wildlife For The Future pillar leader cum The Nature Centre Manager Dev Abdullah, and Senior Marine Biologist cum pillar leader for Fish For The Future, Mukhriz Mahadzir, assisted by Marine Biologist, Ridhwan Mahali.

"I think, prior to our efforts here, the last time I saw a turtle in Datai Bay had to be 1999," says Dev. "It was Christmas Day, and it was right in front of the Water Sports Pavilion." The turtle project component of Fish For The Future, one of the pillars of The Datai Pledge, not only hopes to attract more Olive Ridley, Green and Loggerheads Turtles, but also to give hatchlings a little help on their first day.

Once sea turtles reach the ocean, they embark on a multi-year migration, only to use the Earth's magnetic field to find their way back to the same beach where it all began. That's why ensuring

an optimal environment for nesting and then protecting the eggs once they're laid, is so important.

"We are trying to help more turtles come to the west coast of Malaysia, to Langkawi, and we do have some turtles landing here but it's still very scarce," says Mukhriz. Dev and the rest of The Nature Centre team actually keep nest sites a secret so as to ensure the eggs are not disturbed. "Even when fishermen find the eggs, they don't really know what to do with them and because of that, there's a high chance they will be eaten by wild animals. That's why we have created a hatchery to protect these precious eggs, so that in about 25 years they will return to lay their own eggs here in Datai Bay."

As part of the focus on protecting and restoring marine life by the resort's conservation pillar Fish For The Future under The Datai Pledge, it is integral to once again have sea turtles return to the areas they once did. Sea turtles have played vital roles in maintaining the health of the world's oceans for more than 100 million years, and these roles range from maintaining productive coral reef ecosystems to transporting essential nutrients from the oceans to beaches and coastal dunes.

Part of the project is making the beach safer and more appealing for turtles, including the installation of specialist

lighting and the planting of *Scaevola*, a flowering plant that creates belts of shaded space under which turtles can lay their eggs. "With these additional measures by the resort, the bay is now really the perfect landing site for sea turtles," says Mukhriz.

There is progress, although it's a slow process. "Last November, we had a juvenile Hawksbill visit the bay, and since we established the turtle-friendly lights, we have heard reports from guests that they have seen turtles while kayaking," says Mukhriz. "We suspect that they are attracted by the sea grass in the bay. We have also had reports of an Olive Ridley Sea Turtle being spotted, which would be the first sighting of this species since 2020. For them to come over to this side of the Andaman Sea is quite rare and it's very encouraging."

As the months of September to March are the egg-laying season, the team from The Nature Centre has been busy putting the finishing touches on the little timber hatchery located in a secluded spot on the beach, while also developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for turtle handling. The team has also been developing lines of communication with non-profit organisations and operators on the east coast of Malaysia to get more insight into how they can create a warm welcome for The Datai Langkawi's newest arrivals.

In the hatchery, as temperature determines the turtle's gender, the team aims for the sweet spot of 28-30°C to ensure an even gender mix. The eggs will be incubated for roughly 45 days and when the hatching begins, the team will wait until the turtles' yolk sacs (which Dev describes as a food backpack) fall away naturally – usually half a day or so – in order to allow the tiny turtles a chance to move across the beach and through the water faster. It's a carefully choreographed process. "The afternoon is a suicide mission for them due to the heat and being out in the open and

very visible to predators so when they hatch and when they are released is an important balance," says Mukhriz. Once they hatch, they will have to run a gauntlet of ghost crabs, birds of prey and other natural predators. And that's before they even reach the ocean.

"What we're trying to do is, if there is that one in 1,000 survival rate for newly hatched turtles, we're simply trying to help increase those odds in their favour," says Dev. "If we left the eggs as they were laid, they would be quickly wiped out by monitor lizards, wild boars and other wildlife, as well as poachers. We just want to boost their chances; we already have turtles returning here and I believe these are the ones that I saw being hatched back in 1999," adds Dev.

The plan is bigger than just Datai Bay. Dev is devising a plan to go and rescue eggs that are found on east coast beaches, in places like Terengganu, where a buy-back scheme with former poachers sometimes leads to a surplus. The plan includes collaborating with the Department of Fisheries Malaysia for permits and a truck with tubs filled with water to minimise the movement of the eggs.

On the east coast of Malaysia, turtle eggs are also a traditional delicacy and anything that's not collected by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is picked up by poachers for sale. While buy-back schemes are not a perfect solution, they are a means to protect the eggs and in the process, NGOs teach poachers and communities alike how to properly handle the eggs, which increases their survival rate.

"We need to beat the poachers at their own game or at least have them join us," says Dev. "In fact, we even employ one of the island's most famous poachers here at The Datai Langkawi who is also one of our best trackers."

Now it's just a case of waiting for the turtles to arrive. "We are hoping for guest participation as part of the night patrolling during full moons and the release of hatchlings", says Mukhriz, "but once they hatch, we can't hold them for too long, so we won't be able to guarantee when the releases will take place. Nature has its own schedule."



THE POWER OF YOUTH



Youth For The Future, the fourth pillar of The Datai Langkawi's The Datai Pledge, focuses on empowering and educating the next generation of would-be conservationists and environmentalists on the challenges facing our planet.

There's little doubt that sustainability, climate change and the impact humanity has on our home is probably the most universal challenge we face as a species. However, the solution to many of these issues lies not with the power brokers of today but with the generations to come.

That's where Youth For The Future comes in. Focusing on education and empowerment so that young people can become part of the solution to these crucial challenges, the pillar's programmes are led by Johan Abdullah, Youth for the Future Pillar Leader and Director of Human Resources at The Datai Langkawi (read more about Johan on pg 42). The goal is to create an understanding of sustainable living, both with individuals and with their communities, while inculcating them with the knowledge, actions and activities to help them forge a more positive future.

To do this, The Datai Pledge has partnered with the

Green Growth Asia Foundation (GGAF), a Malaysian NGO whose aim is to respond to sustainability challenges in Asia through 'green growth' programmes; initiatives that drive economic prosperity through social inclusivity and environmental responsibility and through advancing education programmes.

"What gets me excited is knowing that people care - and not just people but young people," says Johan. "We see our youth exposed to the impact of pollution and that realisation fuels change, not just in their minds but in their behaviour and in their willingness to pursue sustainable practices."

A key part of the Youth For The Future initiative is its sponsorship of three Langkawi schools - Sekolah Kebangsaan Temonyong, Sekolah Kebangsaan Kelibang and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tunku Putra - as part of the Kedah Eco-Schools Programme. This programme is the world's largest sustainable education

programme, with a presence at 59,000 schools in 74 countries. The programme runs under the umbrella of the Foundation for Environmental Education, Denmark and it supports the goals of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) with a three-year programme cycle that comprises preparation, implementation and reporting.

The reporting aspect is especially interesting; the Young Reporters for the Environment initiative (YRE), an award-winning programme present in 43 countries worldwide, recently facilitated a visit by local school students to The Datai Langkawi, where they were educated on sustainability, conservation and the efforts of The Datai Pledge by its Pillar Leaders and the team from The Nature Centre. Focused on young people aged between 11 and 25 years old, the platform encourages research of environmental issues and the promotion of greater investigation and environmental issues through reporting, photography and video journalism. As part of the programme, two YRE students recently visited The Datai Langkawi and created educational videos on the work of The Datai Pledge, productions that will later be shown in Malaysian schools.

"Due to the movement restrictions in 2020 and 2021, we focused on activities that we could



do virtually, and that would still be engaging for school children," says Johan. "Children make such great advocates for sustainability - they even are influencers of many things, including where their parents go on holiday and the decisions their parents make in their everyday lives; often encouraging them to be more sustainable."

In addition, a series of webinars conducted by The Datai Pledge team members for local and international young people - part of the Foundation for Environment Education's (FEE) Global Youth Schools Webinar Programme - will be expanded to reach more audiences as Pillar members spread the word on sustainability, conservation and environmental responsibility. To date, 1,233 local and international students have been reached through the Global Youth Schools Webinar series, with The Datai Pledge's webinar 'Sustainability in the Hospitality Industry' setting a new record for participation, with 890 participants.

Finally, Youth For The Future also organises crucial beach clean-up sessions regularly, encouraging Dataians from all departments to collect trash and ocean plastic from Datai Bay and beyond. There are also plans for school children to participate in these activities, so that they can learn about the impact of pollution and ways to help mitigate its damaging effects.

GREEN GOALS

Malaysia's Green Growth Asia Foundation, a partner NGO of The Datai Pledge's Youth For The Future programme, is dedicated to driving sustainable economic growth in emerging economies in Asia.

For its fourth pillar, Youth For The Future, The Datai Pledge has partnered with Malaysian NGO, Green Growth Asia Foundation (GGAF), an organisation dedicated to supporting, promoting and driving inclusive sustainable growth in Malaysia and beyond. Following the guiding principles of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), GGAF's programmes range from promoting green-focused entrepreneurial development and training to community-driven conservation initiatives, as well as youth-based education projects, like the *Eco-Schools Programme*, which the GGAF has spearheaded in Malaysia, under the umbrella of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The Eco-Schools Programme is an education-based initiative, which encourages young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it through an eco-project that they identify, design and implement in their local area. The programme extends beyond the



classroom into ecosystems at risk and partners with organisations like The Datai Pledge and operators like The Datai Langkawi to give participants real-world exposure to the natural world they seek to protect.

Designed to complement the schools' existing curriculums and conducted in partnership with state governments in Kedah, Malacca and Perak, the Eco-Schools programme delivers knowledge and tools to youth aged 11-25 years old, creating the next generation of sustainability ambassadors as well as a ripple effect that brings positive change to communities across Malaysia. At present, the programme is active in 14 primary and secondary schools in Kedah, including three on Langkawi Island.

Through this programme, young people experience a sense of achievement at being able to have a say in the environmental management policies of their schools and even serve as advocates to the local and national governments. Participating students become green advocates and ambassadors



for life, spearheading change within their communities and for generations to come.

However, GGAF's activities are not limited to the Eco-Schools programme. Its *Adopt-a-School* initiative is a funding mechanism that allows projects like the Eco-Schools to operate, while *The Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programme* fuels sustainable economic growth in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand; and the *Climate Ready Classrooms* project teaches school children to understand climate change issues and encourages carbon emission reduction.

The Foundation also created awareness of sea turtle conservation with its 2019 *Back 2 Nature – Turtle Camp Programme*, in partnership with UNDP SGP GEF, WWF Malaysia and the Department of Fisheries, and continued these efforts with the Turtle Friendly Lighting Project, which retrofit 27 amber-toned LED streetlights in Melaka's Padang Kemuning Beach so they would not harm nesting hawksbill turtles.

GGAF is led by a passionate team of professionals from a wide range of backgrounds, including Executive Director Ts. Dr Mahadi Bin Mohamad, Chief Executive Mr Balamurugan Ratha Krishnan, and Chief Programme Officer Mr Sri Themudu who have extensive experience developing sustainable regional agricultural, tourism and environmental policy; Guidance comes from the GGAF Strategic Solutions Panel, which is made up of experts from fields as diverse as Environmental Management, Environmental Planning and Civil Engineering, through to Tourism and Philanthropy.

DESIGN INSPIRED BY NATURE



The Nature Centre at The Datai Langkawi takes its design cues from the traditional tribal longhouses of Malaysia's most remote tribes.

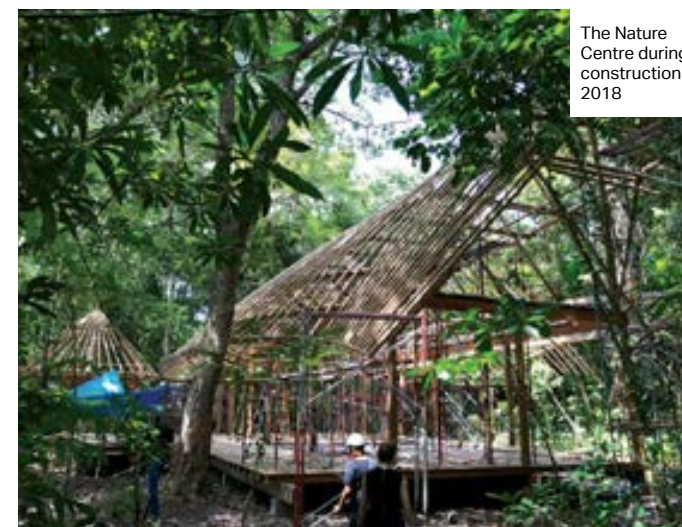
Next time you're down at The Nature Centre learning about the resort's resident otter family or the graceful hornbills that swoop from tree to towering tree above The Dining Room, spare a thought for the building that houses so much knowledge. Envisioned by original The Datai Langkawi designer, Didier Lefort of design agency DL2A, who was also the lead architect for the resort's extensive refurbishment in 2018, during which this centre for research and insight was built, The Nature Centre offers a unique open-air layout that takes its inspiration from the tribal bamboo longhouses of Malaysian Borneo.

"This building had to reflect the spirit of its use, which is to remain closest to the unique natural environment of the surrounding tropical forest and to offer an understanding of the fauna and flora of the ecosystem," says Didier. "The building is surrounded by the forest and is close to the beach to allow

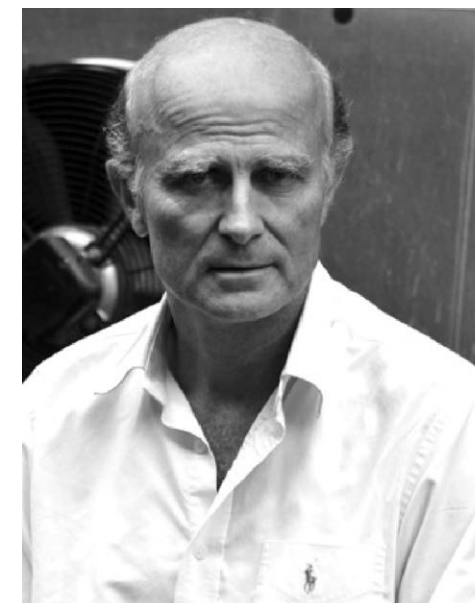
direct contact with both environments and is also the starting point for both forest and sea exploration."

Wreathed by an outdoor pavilion, from which many of the resort's nature hikes begin, the design of The Nature Centre is one created to inspire curiosity and understanding of the natural world and to bring the outside and inside worlds together.

"It's the best office in the world," says The Nature Centre Manager, Dev Abdullah. "It has a lot of bamboo, and uses thatch on the roof, and the design is just beautiful, one reminiscent of an upside-down boat."



The Nature Centre during construction in 2018



Didier Lefort, architect of The Nature Centre

WORKING FOR CHANGE

Johan Abdullah,
Youth For The Future
Pillar Leader and Director
Of Human Resources
at The Datai Langkawi,
discusses the importance of
leadership roles, adapting
to changing circumstances,
and the efforts of
The Datai Pledge.



Where do you call home?

I'm from Penang, so I'm very much a local.

How did you first get into the hospitality industry?

I entered into hospitality as a young 20-year-old and it was completely by accident. After I finished my exams, I originally applied as a hotel bellman and attended an interview at a hotel in Petaling Jaya, but they quickly noticed that I'm not a big guy and that the luggage was probably bigger than me! So instead, they suggested a role as a clerk in the Personnel and Training Department – there were no fancy names like Human Resources in those days – and when the hotel offered to help pay for my studies while I worked, I was hooked.

In those days, the concept of personnel and training was meant for servicemen, who had retired and were joining the workforce, and it was focused on their strengths of leadership and discipline. When I first went to the class, I was shocked because I was the youngest, but I knew I had found my passion for both hospitality and operations.

Was this when you decided to move to Langkawi?

Yes, I moved from the Hilton Petaling Jaya hotel to Langkawi in 1993, where I worked as the Personnel Officer at Pelangi Beach Resort. I arrived at The Datai Langkawi in 2014.

How has the Human Resources role changed during your career?

It's changed from being just a purely administrative role to a leadership role; one in which you can advise top management about the most important, expensive, complex and difficult resource to deal with, which is human resources. To share my thoughts and feelings, based on my experience as well as being appreciated for those thoughts, is part of the shift from a personnel role to one of a business partner.

How did The Datai Langkawi navigate the pandemic from a Human Resource perspective?

To begin with, the principle that we hold on to is to ensure we're being fair to everyone - and striking that balance is never easy. Sometimes, you have no option but to take the hard position. However, when you realise that the company you work with appreciates the most important resources it has - which is human resources - and they have the financial capacity to do that, that's assuring. During difficult times such as the resort renovation and hotel closure for one year (2017 - 2018), or the recent pandemic for two years (2020 - 2022) with mandated resort closures, The Datai Langkawi did

not let go of anyone, except those that were under a casual employment basis and also not without talking to them first, and letting them understand that when business is back, they will be in mind. We never talk about simply cutting costs because that means cutting without thinking; without considering all other factors. So, we try to consider business challenges strategically and we managed to survive, and when we reopened, we were ahead of our competitors, far ahead. It's all about being ahead of the game.

What are the challenges of bringing in so many new faces post-Covid-19 and maintaining the service levels the resort is known for?

Getting the right candidate is most important. The Covid-19 situation brought about certain opportunities as well, and people are suddenly interested in trying new styles of work – the 'Great Resignation' shows that – and we see a lot of talent moving from one industry to another, including in hospitality. As a result, you end up with a lot of talent that is raw. We are lucky that the majority of our employees were retained, so our focus has been on training, building up our culture, reassuring our staff, retuning them and ensuring that we retain the right DNA and re-establish our core values. We have a very strong team to influence the newcomers. The challenge is how to get the new people to assimilate and deliver the same Datai culture.

What are you looking for in an employee these days?

Job satisfaction, good leadership and of course, common sense. Today, employees don't appreciate working long hours anymore and the laws have not been changed to reflect that. We no longer work in an era when your work performance is based on the hours you work, we need to move away from that and that's what the 'iGen' is looking for, and you must be prepared to accept the fact that they don't stay long, so your

training program has to be aligned to that. Especially with a luxury property like ours, consistency is key and so is quality – if you don't have core people or something to ensure that there is continuity, you're in trouble. Many could leave but would also end up coming back to you, knowing this is the best place to work. At The Datai Langkawi, we don't only have guest returnees; we have many staff returnees too!

What do you think your skill set as a human resources leader brings to your role as Pillar Leader for Youth For The Future?

A function of HR is training and development, and I always believe that if you really want to shape future generations, you need to do it when they're young. Youth For The Future is a great opportunity to shape young people and to expose them to and make them aware of the issues we face, so that when one or two of them become lawmakers, they will know how important it is to protect what we have. Youth For The Future means a lot to me; I get to shape the next generation to protect our planet.

What initiatives of the pillar get you most excited?

Knowing that the young generation cares and wants to know more. For example, with the Young Reporters For The Environment initiative (*read more on pg 36*), one of the participants told me about a river in Johor where he lives and believes factories are polluting the waters. He was inspired to spread awareness of the issue and what the consequences are if we don't act – all because of his exposure to the programme. It's important to me that I can, and the company can, be advocates for this change. Children can be very influential when it comes to the decisions made by a family, take for example their influence on family holidays!

In conclusion, are these initiatives having a real work impact?

I've been involved in grading the papers of the Young Reporters For The Environment and I can see that the students are really researching the issues with the content coming from the heart, and that to me is a great sign. I'm very sure that with social media, they will share their thoughts and findings, with the hope that it multiplies and amplifies.

In addition, working with pillar partner Green Growth Asia Foundation is a godsend; they're affiliated with international organisations like the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and Eco-Schools Global and they're introducing this largest sustainable schools programme worldwide to Malaysian schools, which is not just about classroom lessons but also involves going out and learning about environmental challenges in the real world. The Datai Langkawi is sponsoring three schools (of the 14 Eco-Schools on the island) and not only has it been a very effective programme by itself, but it's also been a chance for us to see how we can best collaborate and integrate Youth For The Future with the other three pillars of The Datai Pledge.



A ROAD TO SUCCESS

The Datai Langkawi has partnered with **BMW Group Malaysia** to support the goals of The Datai Pledge.

As part of its continued efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and enhance sustainability across its operations - in line with The Datai Pledge - The Datai Langkawi has entered into a partnership with BMW Group Malaysia and authorised dealer Tian Siang Premium Auto to introduce two BMW Charging Stations which were installed in the resort's forecourt.

The new initiative allows guests to explore the beautiful surrounds of The Datai Langkawi in an environmentally friendly way - in their own electric car or behind the wheel of the all-electric BMW iX or onboard one of their plug in hybrid electric vehicles, available for test drive for resort guests for a limited time. Experience the smooth and quiet comfort of a fully electric powered vehicle while you admire the lush beauty of the rainforest around you on a short trip to The Els Club Teluk Datai, just 5 minutes from the resort, or venture a bit further to explore the stunning Temurun Waterfalls. Guests can also charge their own e-cars

at the 2 charging stations which are exclusively accessible for guests of The Datai Langkawi.

"Sustainability and conservation are at the core of our business strategy, and we integrate these values into all aspects of our company ethos, operations and guest experiences at the resort," says Arnaud Girodon, General Manager of The Datai Langkawi. "Offering this BMW charging station to our guests is just one of our many efforts in moving towards cleaner air and regenerative travel, to reaffirm our commitment to protecting the rich biodiversity of Langkawi for generations to come."

The partnership between BMW and The Datai Langkawi is one more initiative that will support the overall objectives of the Pure For The Future pillar - the segment of The Datai Pledge that aims to act responsibly and place sustainability at the heart of the resort's business operations.

With an ambition to become carbon neutral by 2024, The Datai Langkawi is always looking at ways to reduce its carbon footprint. The resort laid the groundwork to become a carbon-neutral destination in 2021, setting up the required assessment process through a partnership with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), as well as through its ongoing collaboration with EarthCheck, an organization that audits all business processes of the resort on an annual basis. As part of



this lofty goal, the carbon stock (the amount of carbon stored in the forest ecosystem, mainly in the living biomass and soil) of the surrounding rainforest is measured.

Thanks to The Datai Langkawi's multi-departmental efforts, zero-waste to the landfill was achieved for the first time in December 2021, and consequently for more than 120 days in 2022. The property's carbon neutrality efforts also led to the prevention of 177 metric tons of CO2 from polluting the environment.



clockwise from opposite page: the BMW iX40 at the new BMW i-charging station; Arnaud Girodon (General Manager of The Datai Langkawi), Tan Ka Kin (Managing Director of Tian Siang Premium Auto) and Sashi Ambi (Head of Corporate Communications of BMW Group Malaysia) officially inaugurate the i-charging station at The Datai Langkawi; Arnaud Girodon explores the all-electric BMW iX40 with Sashi Ambi

THE ORANG ASLI STORY

As partner of The Datai Pledge and official photographer of the trust, award-winning photojournalist **SC Shekar** has spent years working with marginalised indigenous tribes in Malaysia. His work has helped give a voice to these ancient peoples while raising awareness of the challenges the **Orang Asli** face in today's Malaysia.



The indigenous people in Malaysia are very closely knit and live within extended families, taking turns to look after and nurture their young.



© Drew Harris

Words and Photographs by SC Shekar

For the past twenty years, I have been visually documenting various indigenous communities in the country as part of my project to record the lives of various Orang Asli tribes who have lived on these lands since time immemorial. They have always been the unofficial custodians of the rainforests and all the rivers within. Part of what I'm trying to do is to assess the needs of these communities. Sadly, many of them have been displaced from their original ancestral lands deep in the rainforests because of logging and mining activities. It is no secret that huge areas of native land, where they once thrived, have been illegally or fraudulently acquired or transferred to plantations, logging, and mining companies over the years.

With their main source of food and water contaminated by these activities, there has been a mass exodus of our

Orang Asli people to the periphery of the jungles, close to towns where they struggle to assimilate into mainstream society. In about 80% of the cases I have encountered, water and electricity is scarce or non-existent and most of the assistance they receive is from a few non-profit organisations, both local and foreign, who help these communities by providing solar panels and water filtration devices.

Photo-journalist SC Shekar makes monthly visits to various Orang Asli villages to distribute milk powder for infants and toddlers who suffer from malnutrition.

As a partner and contributor of The Datai Pledge, I strive to bring about some awareness to the plight of the Orang Asli who struggle with the challenges of being displaced. Through my photography and the stories I tell, my hope is that Malaysians and visitors to the country will be able to understand why positive affirmative action needs to be taken to assist these marginalised communities. I'm also actively engaged in efforts to provide better nutrition to malnourished indigenous children living on the fringes of the rainforests in Muadzam Shah, in the state of Pahang. The children there, in their formative years, receive a regular supply of powdered milk formula specifically for infants and toddlers.

The Datai Pledge (www.thedataipledge.org) which is a private trust dedicated to improving the well-being of the environment, wildlife, and local and indigenous communities in Malaysia, was initiated in 2019. Many community programmes which have benefited from the work of volunteers as well as funds from the trust, have seen a significant positive change.



Emily Koh is a cheerful 4 year old Jakun girl and is the youngest daughter of the village headman.



Indigenous women and children from the Jakun tribe in Muadzam Shah, Pahang are forced to bathe in a stagnant pond because no piped water or electricity is available in their village.

A two year old indigenous child plays with her brothers in a landfill as their mother scavenges for recyclable materials to earn a living. Many displaced indigenous tribes throughout the country are forced to eke out a living doing menial jobs to survive.

LANGKAWI NATURE, A CERAMICIST'S MUSE

Local ceramics artist **Radzi Ismail** finds inspiration in Langkawi's natural world.



Many artists find creative inspiration in Langkawi. Perhaps, for some, it's the contemplative, slow-paced island life that allows their creative juices to flow. For one Langkawi artist, it is nature. Ceramicist Radzi Ismail finds Langkawi's abundance of nature, on both land and sea, to be his muse.

Born and raised in Langkawi, the now 40-year-old Radzi's first love was for drawing, which led him to pursue a creative arts degree at the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in Selangor. Under the watchful eye of a passionate instructor, he was swayed towards the world of ceramics. By 2010, he had secured a Master's degree in Fine Arts and Ceramic Technology. At this point in his life, the shores of Langkawi called him back home.

Radzi's parents, initially reluctant about his career choice, were elated when their creative offspring decided to open the very first ceramic studio in Langkawi. It wasn't long before his reputation for quality work brought customers to his door. Soon, his ceramic creations were appearing almost everywhere on the island, including The Datai Langkawi.

Unique Creations

"Each piece is handmade and that's why no two pieces are the same," explains Radzi. "They may look similar, but they're not the same."

In addition to each piece having its own unique design, each of Radzi's clients has its own colour palette,



referred to as the 'glaze' in the world of ceramics. And of course, Radzi's special glazes and designs are inspired by the colours and movements of the island's natural world.

It's all about the process

From start to finish, Radzi's ceramic creations take a full two weeks to process. Many clients don't always understand the particulars of the process and want to escalate the timeline, however, to do so would jeopardise the quality and longevity of their ceramics.

Similar to quality cuisine, quality ceramics start with quality ingredients. Radzi gets his clay and glaze from the best location in the country, in the state of Perak.

Once a ceramic design is created in clay and dried for 3 to 7 days at room temperature, it is then put into the studio's onsite kiln for about 10 hours at 900 degrees Celsius. This step in the process is known as bisque firing and prepares it to be resistant to damage and absorbent for glazing in the next step. It is important for the firing to be at a consistent temperature to avoid cracks in the clay forming later.

The kiln is gas powered, just in case there might be an electricity outage, because kiln firing cannot be interrupted or the change in temperature destroys the ceramic. Once the bisque firing is complete, pieces can be stored for future use or taken on to the glazing process.

Glazes used at Ilham Ceramic Studio are food-friendly, meaning they are safe for humans when the ceramics are fired at the appropriate kiln firing temperature. The final firing of glazed ceramics must always be 1200 degrees Celsius for 12 to 13 uninterrupted hours, before the entire process is complete. Getting the finished product can be a lot of work, but they're well worth waiting for.

Ilham Ceramic Studio is not only the first ceramic studio in Langkawi, but also the only Langkawi-based operation to create ceramics. Radzi now has a full-time staff of three, Amirul, Panglima and Zul, who help him keep up with supply and demand.

In addition to running a successful ceramic business, at the end of the day, Radzi is still an artist to the core. His personal body of work leans towards the surreal and whimsical; from fanciful, tropical birds, to exaggerated Mudskipper fish. His Langkawi muse is always with him, providing endless inspiration.

At The Datai Langkawi, look out for these unique ceramics at all the restaurants.

*Ilham Ceramic Studio
1500 Kampung Bendang Baru Langkawi, Malaysia*





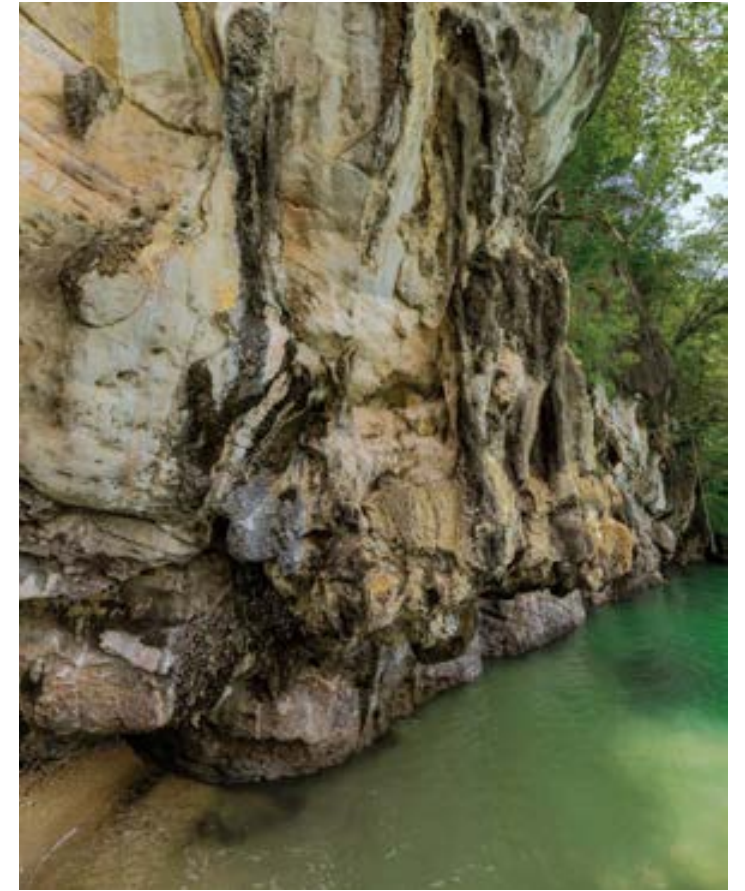
THE CAVE OF LEGENDS

On an island wreathed in myths and mysteries, the story of **Gua Cherita**, Langkawi's Cave of Legends, has stood the test of time.

Few caves in Malaysia have the legacy of Gua Cherita. Located high up on a mountain flank facing the sea, and with two entrances and no road access, the cave has always attracted the intrepid and curious, many of whom have left their mark. There is said to be graffiti dating back to the 1950s, while verses from the Qur'an and from Arabic folklore can be found faintly etched into its entrance.

Two deep limestone caves set into towering peaks, Gua Cherita is said to have once been the home to Gedembai, a giantess who could transform her enemies into many things, including oxen. One legend states that when Gedembai discovered the cave and decided it would make an excellent home, she was confronted by angry local villagers. She responded to their complaints by turning them into stone, which accounts for the towering stalagmites that can still be seen rising from the cave floor.

Another popular legend that combines elements of both religion and fantasy says that Garuda, a large mythical bird-like creature that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology, being intent on stopping the nuptials of a Chinese imperial princess and a Roman prince – a marriage that would create an unstoppable alliance – kidnapped the princess while her fleet was anchored in Sri Lanka. He then flew her to Langkawi and kept her in the cave of Gua Cherita. King Solomon had advised Garuda not to meddle, saying that God's will could not be altered, but Garuda refused to listen.



To stop her fleet from trying to retrieve the princess, Garuda whipped up a mighty storm, and the Roman prince is said to have drowned. Once sure that the marriage would be no more, Garuda left the cave and the princess behind. As the story goes, the princess, now marooned on the island, once walked along the beach and encountered a young man shipwrecked and barely alive. She nursed him back to health only to discover that it was her prince. When the couple was eventually rescued, the wedding continued, just as King Solomon had predicted.

ATTITUDE OVER ALTITUDE

Located on the island of Borneo, **Mt Kinabalu** is the tallest mountain in Malaysia and a favoured peak for novice climbers.

An icon of Malaysia and a destination for both avid hikers and intrepid adventurers from across the region, Mt Kinabalu is a must-visit for anyone bound for Borneo. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed *Gunung Kinabalu* may be rated 'climber-friendly', but it is also the third highest peak of an island on Earth. The substantial igneous granodiorite (medium- to coarse-grained rock containing quartz, or just 'granite') peak, part of the Crocker Range that neatly divides the west and east coasts of Sabah, is considered in mountaineering circles to be one of the most approachable summits around, which is why it welcomes up to 135 climbers each day.

Beginning at the Timpohon Gate at 1,800m, it's a nine-kilometre hike to Low's Peak at the 4,095m summit. Make allowances for drizzle, wind and fog, common weather at the higher altitudes, so be sure to pack spare, lightweight clothes. Climbers will also encounter a few naked rock faces and thinning air on the 2.2km vertical climb on what is mostly a muddy rock-strewn staircase covered in tree roots. But if you ever wanted to climb a proper mountain without a



The views from the summit of Mt Kinabalu draw up to 135 hikers daily

team of sherpas, thermal suit, crampons and bottled oxygen, then Kinabalu is for you.

Allow two days to make the climb, remembering that a mandatory park guide must accompany you or your group on your journey. Start out in the morning after a hearty early breakfast on day one with a plan to summit and be back soaking in a hot bath by dinner time the next day. It's a sensible timeline, but there are those who are never satisfied with sensible. For example, the ultra-elite band of so-called 'sky runners' will set out from the base clad in high-tech sneakers, hydration backpacks and fluro shorts and be back checking their standing heart rate in well under three hours.

The trek starts out innocently enough, like a leisurely stroll in the woods, but quickly becomes more strenuous as the path gets steeper and the oxygen thinner. One flight of damp rocky steps is followed by another, then another. Fortunately, dotted along the route is a series of *pondoks* (picnic shelters) with rudimentary washrooms and seats from which you can take on the stunning Alpine vistas while brazen little squirrels scamper about cleaning up any food scraps left behind.

While you concentrate on your careful steps ahead, it's easy to forget that all around you is a 750 sq km UNESCO World Heritage-listed biosphere that boasts one of the richest concentrations of flora covering four distinct climate zones. From thick conifer forests, oak and colourful rhododendron to stubby little alpine bushes and medicinal flowers, the attributes of which are known only to the local Dusun community, the park is much more than just a tough uphill hike. This may explain why around 80% of visitors don't bother with the climb at all, and instead content themselves with a visit to the botanical garden that concentrates most of the park's flora into one easy location.



Designated in 1964, Kinabalu was one of the first national parks of Malaysia and was the country's first World Heritage Site designated by UNESCO in December 2000 on account of the more than 4,500 species of flora and fauna, including 326 bird and around 100 mammal species. There are some 110 land snail species alone.

Named after the British colonial administrator and naturalist Hugh Low, who was the first known European to reach the peak, Low's Peak juts upward like a giant meringue tart plopped atop a huge granite cake, all engulfed by the slow-motion, multi-coloured thron. Here, early each morning, climbers make their final shuffle to the tip of the soaring peak in the warming rays of dawn, breathing in the satisfaction of a job well done and the prospect of a downhill return journey.

Some frequent climbers figured Kinabalu was not tough enough and devised a series of permanent ropes, pegs and steps based on the European 'via ferrata', Italian for 'Iron Way' system. This installation was devised by the Italian Army during the First World War to move troops and even small artillery



pieces in the Alps to get one up on their enemy, the Austrians. The military success of that can be argued, but here on the weathered granite surfaces near Low's Peak, the experience adds a whole new dimension to Mt Kinabalu.

Suiting up for the descent means climbing into a harness with lots of metal hooks called carabiners. Add a helmet, gloves and a scrunchy-like safety strap called a 'scorpio' designed to catch you if you take an unanticipated tumble, and you're all set for the adventure of a lifetime.

Formed within the last 10 to 35 million years, Kinabalu is one of the youngest mountains in the world, not counting volcanoes, and still grows at a rate of five millimetres annually. There are two *via ferrata* options for the junior Hillaries and Tensings; one is a challenging odyssey through jungle and across dizzying ravines called the Low's Peak Circuit that begins at 3,776m, while another, at 3,520m, has been dubbed Walk the Torq and simply shortcuts the rocky staircase and is suitable for kids over 10 years. Both terminate at 3,411m.

Like the summit itself, these routes are not to be scoffed at. The series of rungs, ropes, cables and bridges is the highest via ferrata in the world and certified by the Guinness World Records. There's a cute stamped and verified certificate waiting for you after you unbuckle your safety suit in the hut after your climb.

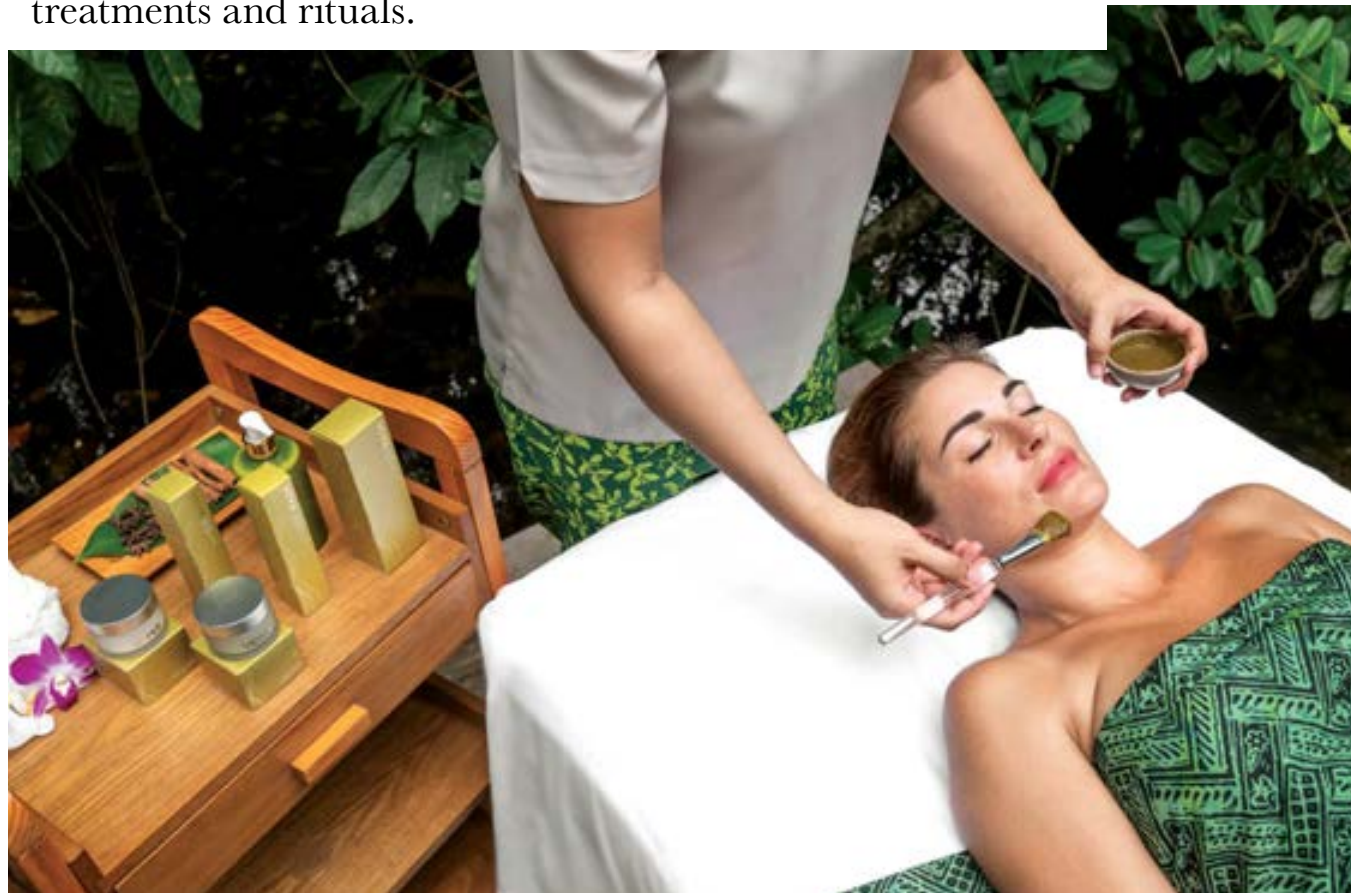
Mt Kinabalu may be on many climber's bucket list and prove the perfect two day foray into the jungles of Borneo, but for anyone who completes the climb and also takes the time to wonder at the marvellous biodiversity of the huge park, it's a doubly rewarding, and uniquely Malaysian, experience. ■

clockwise from top left:

Sabahan villagers walk through a hanging bridge across a river with beautiful majestic Mount Kinabalu in the background; Mt Kinabalu's surrounding national park is famed for its diversity of flora and fauna; the peak rising above the rainforest

GIFTS FROM THE SEA

The Datai Langkawi recently added a new range of organic Irish spa products from VOYA to its world-class line-up of treatments and rituals.



Next time you walk along the beach at The Datai Langkawi, spare a thought for seaweed. While many of us think of it as a slimy, slippery ocean plant best enjoyed when it's been dried out and wrapped around some sushi, the powerful nutrients of certain seaweed species have long been recognised by holistic practitioners. Family-owned Irish company VOYA, founded by husband-and-wife team, Mark and Kira Walton, has won acclaim for its hand-harvested seaweed products, which are crafted from seaweed foraged from weather-battered Sligo, a town on Ireland's Atlantic Coast.

Seaweed has been recognised in Ireland for its medicinal attributes for over 300 years. At its peak, Ireland boasted more than 300 seaweed baths (the first opened in 1912), and people visited them to treat everything from arthritis to skin conditions like eczema. Naturally absorbing its nourishment from the sea, over 80% of the plant is made up of essential minerals, vitamins, and other bioactive compounds; working as a powerful antioxidant to fight against free radicals that damage cells and DNA.

VOYA is more than just a wellness story, though - it's also one of sustainability. Sharing

a commitment to conserving nature's beauty with The Datai Langkawi, VOYA helps to protect the biodiversity of the west coast of Ireland's reefs through sustainable and traditional seaweed harvesting practices.

"From the outset of starting our business, we've been extremely conscious of preserving the tradition of sustainable seaweed harvesting. We believe it's vital to respect the environment and the precious flora and fauna that flourish around it and help conserve the biodiversity of the surrounding coral reefs," says co-founder Kira Walton. "In addition, off-setting carbon emissions and funding The World Land Trust's rainforest-saving global initiatives demonstrate our belief that the well-being of nature and humanity will always go hand in hand," she adds.

The brand's eco-credentials continue in its packaging, which include recycled and biodegradable materials, utilising vegetable inks and, you guessed it, dried seaweed.

The VOYA range of spa products and treatments help cleanse and purify the skin, while improving suppleness and elasticity, smoothing, and stimulating right to the cellular level. Scientific studies have confirmed that the seaweed contained in VOYA products, particularly the Laminaria Digitata and Fucus Serratus seaweeds, improves collagen production in the skin by over 200% and 140% respectively.

While the VOYA Seaweed Baths spa in Strandhill, Ireland, which opened in 1996, has become a pilgrimage destination for wellness lovers, you won't have to travel quite so far to enjoy the benefits of their products. The new range of indulgent treatments by VOYA available at The Spa of The Datai Langkawi contain certified organic and sustainable seaweed – mainly Laminaria Digitata and Fucus Serratus varieties – that are packed with vitamins and nutrients, including algal polyphenols and carotenoids; proven antioxidants that protect against the signs of ageing. Knowing that every skin type needs to be treated differently, a specific type



of seaweed is carefully selected for each guest before the treatment commences.

New results-driven seaweed-based treatments at the resort's spa include the 70-minute Nurture with Nature Facial, which is designed to stimulate collagen production to reduce lines and wrinkles with a combination of antioxidant algae complexes and aromatherapy. There's also the 60-minute Radiance Facial, an ocean-inspired treatment that detoxifies and tones the skin, releasing toxic microparticles and repairing damage caused by pollution and chemical exposure.

Want to rejuvenate tired eyes? Then book the 45-minute Marine Eye Treatment, which features an eye compress made from hand-harvested Laminaria Digitata seaweed. For the ultimate seaweed experience, try the 90-minute Jewel of The Datai, a facial treatment that begins with a relaxing back massage, followed by a hydrating facial using Laminaria seaweed fronds. ■



VOYA

ORGANIC BEAUTY

VOYA is an Irish organic lifestyle brand that creates hand-harvested seaweed skincare, lifestyle products & spa treatments that are available globally in luxury outlets. VOYA promotes an organic philosophy and provides high-quality, truly organic, seaweed-based wellness and beauty experiences. VOYA continues the sustainable harvesting practices of our forefathers with the integrity of the seaweed bathing tradition. We strive to make our environmental impact as low as possible and be an example of responsibility, not just in the world of beauty.

A BIRD'S VIEW OF PARADISE

Acclaimed Malaysian photographer **SC Shekar**, official photographer for and Partner of The Datai Pledge, reminisces on his first visit to The Datai Langkawi and the lingering effect its spectacular natural surrounds has left.



S.C. Shekar began his career as a photojournalist in the late 1970s, then moved on to specialise in editorial and architectural photography. Although trained as a lawyer, this self-taught photographer has concentrated on socio-documentary photography projects around the world over the past three decades. He has focused on indigenous communities (referred to as *Orang Asli* in the Malay language), creating an unparalleled portfolio of pictures of their life as well as their struggles. Shekar's work has appeared in many solo exhibitions, and is collected in National Art Galleries worldwide.

He has published more than two dozen books of photography, covering themes as diverse as architecture, food culture, portraiture and indigenous people's lives and crafts. His most recent major project is 'Grit & Grace: The Grandeur of Monochrome Malaysia', a stunning collection of photos of Malaysia's topography and communities - a selection of these photos are collected by the The Datai Langkawi and are on display along the corridors of the resort.

Shekar is currently working on a project documenting Southeast Asia from the air titled 'Nusantara', in collaboration with Bellflight USA and Sigma Japan. The award-winning Shekar is also the official photographer of The Datai Pledge, contributing pro bono, to bring about awareness to the fragility of the environment and to highlight the plight of the indigenous people in the rainforests. (www.scshekar.com)

One of the most rewarding aspects of being an architectural photographer is to be able to travel the world to capture the creations of some of the finest architects and their works. A great deal of my understanding about space and time, in the context of architectural photography, has been shaped and nurtured by these great architects. They have had a profound influence on the way I photograph, react, and respond to a given space, capturing the subtle shift of light and shadow, and being aware of how this light influences the space itself. This to me is what photography is all about and is applicable to all genres of the art.

My relationship with The Datai Langkawi began in 1993 when I had the opportunity to photograph this beautiful resort when it was first built. I still have vivid memories of walking into the main lobby on a cool rainy December evening and feeling completely overwhelmed by the imposing wooden structure, the high ceilings and the symmetry of the tall columns flanked by two white, life-sized wooden horses, which

led me to the lily pond within. And whilst in this space, amidst the chirping cicadas and the croaking frogs, it suddenly occurred to me that I was really standing in a 10-million-year-old rainforest! It was nothing like I had ever seen, experienced or photographed before. Even to this day, I still have this feeling of awe every time I check into the resort.

I must have spent almost three weeks photographing the resort and made the most of my free time in between photoshoots exploring the surrounding rainforests, isolated waterfalls, and the pristine white sandy beach of Datai Bay. I also discovered a large variety of hornbills, nocturnal flying foxes, and river otters in the wild, creatures I had never seen before in my native city of Kuala Lumpur.

Thirty years on, as I look back at some of the old pictures of the resort and the landscapes then, I journey back to that specific moment, feeling each of my senses come alive. This ability to capture a moment and preserve it for all eternity is incredibly forceful and is nonetheless superior to everything the human mind can

or could have conceived to assure us of reality. Hence the presence of photographs allows for memories and conversations to begin.

Many of the aerial images I have captured all over the country, including in the east Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, have been published in a book titled *Grit & Grace - The Grandeur of Monochrome Malaysia* (refer to page 62). Within this book you'll discover not just breathtaking landscapes but also images of our many indigenous people or *Orang Asli* as they are referred to, within these landscapes. If you've not already seen it, the corridors and suites of the resort display framed photographs of some images from this book.

I still photograph extensively in Malaysia and in particular over Langkawi, with a special focus on the beautiful rainforests that The Datai Langkawi is built within. The high-resolution aerial images I captured from a helicopter can record the most minute of details which would otherwise be impossible to perceive with the naked eye. If you look even closer at these pictures, you'll find that the entire resort blends in seamlessly with the trees and the terrain, almost as if mother nature herself nurtured its growth. This, I believe, is the genius of the architect Kerry Hill and interior designer Didier Lefort, whose inspiration must have descended from the heavens.



GRIT & GRACE: THE GRANDEUR OF MALAYSIA IN MONOCHROME

Beagle Books.
ISBN 978-967010169-5-4,
RM1,500

Acclaimed photographer **SC Shekar** and writer **Liew Suet Fun** navigate the nature, traditions, culture, and people of Malaysia in their epic photo book, *Grit & Grace*.



Few chronicles on Malaysia could be as vast or as encompassing as *Grit & Grace*, a fascinating if not weighty (it's 5kg) tome by award-winning photographer SC Shekar, with text by Liew Suet Fun, that captures the diversity of the country in black and white.

Insightful, emotive, and endearing, the 330-page large format book (which is available for sale at The Boutique at The Datai Langkawi) is one that begs to be absorbed; with each monochromatic image a symphony of textures, as much as it is a moment captured forever. Containing over 300 black and white images, captured from across all of Malaysia's 13 states, the book recounts photojournalist Shekar's journey through a country he clearly has a deep passion for. From a play on light cast across the peaks of the Cameron Highlands, to the lines etched into the weathered face of a Dayak tribesman, each image is a story and the book, a tapestry of Malaysia's foundation, its development and its proud spirit.

From awe-inspiring aerial shots of undulating landscapes that offer a riot of texture despite the monochromatic medium, to striking, often confronting portraits of the people that call them home, *Grit & Grace* offers the reader an uncanny intimacy with one of the region's most culturally and politically complex countries. An initiative supported by Khazanah Nasional to celebrate Malaysia's journey and achievements and which led to a nationwide exhibition, the book also instils a sense of ownership and pride that every Malaysian would appreciate.



© SC Shekar

Black Giant Squirrel by the lobby of The Datai Langkawi



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