

ISSUE #6

IKHILAS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DATAI LANGKAWI



DESIGN
HERE
IN THE
FOREST
DEEP

IN THE KITCHEN
THE TALENTS
OF THE
CHEF SERIES
2022

THE DATAI PLEDGE
SAVING THE
HORNBILL,
ONE TREE
AT A TIME

TRAVEL
THE BEST
DIVING FROM
ACROSS
MALAYSIA

THE CHEF SERIES



Malaysia



JOHNSON WONG

Gen, Penang
6-7 January



MASAKI ARAKAWA

Sushi Azabu, Kuala Lumpur
25-26 February



AZLI AHMAD

OpenHouse, Kuala Lumpur
22-23 April



RAYMOND THAM

Beta and Skillet, Kuala Lumpur
17-18 June



MASASHI HORIUCHI

Entier, Kuala Lumpur
18-19 August



LEE ZHE XI AND SOH YONG ZHI

Eat and Cook, Kuala Lumpur
6-7 October

BRINGING YOU THE BEST FROM
MALAYSIA'S ECLECTIC DINING EXPERIENCES

- PART 1 -



Welcome to another issue of IKHLAS, the magazine of The Datai Langkawi, and to a new era for the resort, as Malaysia, along with many other nations, reopens its borders in the wake of the recession of the global pandemic. Malaysia has begun welcoming international travellers again without the need for quarantine or testing, and we are excited to welcome back so many loyal guests after so long.

Returning guests will notice many new additions to The Datai Langkawi experience, not least of which is the arrival of Chef Chai, our new Senior Chef de Cuisine at The Dining Room. With a career that spans tenures at esteemed two and three-Michelin starred restaurants, Malaysian Chef Chai brings a wealth of experience and inspiration to our fine-dining venue and showcases his talents with a nine-course degustation menu, paired with hand-picked wines from our walk-in wine cellar.

Many of Chef Chai's ingredients are sourced from the resort's Permaculture Garden - one of the most important ongoing projects at The Datai Langkawi and I encourage all guests to visit to see first-hand our sustainability and waste management efforts. In addition, we are working on exciting new projects that support our sustainability goals, including the building of a turtle hatchery near our Nature Centre, and gazetted Datai Bay as a designated Marine Park. We have already succeeded in making our beach more turtle friendly by adjusting light intensity at night and planting more *Scaveola taccada* (sea lettuce) along the beach - the preferred plant under which turtles like to dig their nests. We now hope that turtles will return to lay their eggs at our shores; we will then protect the nests so a maximum number of baby sea turtles can hatch safely and find their way back into the ocean. Moreover, designating Datai Bay as a Marine Park will help conserve the fragile marine habitats and threatened species in our bay - we are one of only 11 organizations that have been appointed Reef Care partners by the Department of Fisheries, and the first organization on Malaysia's west coast invited to participate in protecting our vital reefs.

Our sustainability philosophy influences every experience at the resort, including our wellness enclave, which was recently awarded Sustainable Spa of the Year by the World Spa & Wellness Awards 2022. This award joins other recent accolades, including our renewed Silver EarthCheck certification and silver category placement in the Best Hotels in Malaysia section of the DestinAsian 2022 Readers' Choice Awards.

It's been a challenging few years but I look forward to welcoming all our new and returning guests back to our rainforest paradise once again.

Arnaud Girodon
General Manager
The Datai Langkawi

IKHLAS

MAGAZINE

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CULINARY CARNIVALE

Of all the innovations of The Datai Langkawi's culinary team, the acclaimed The Chef Series is a firm favourite with both guests and visiting chefs, and 2022 promises to be no exception.

Considered one of the premier culinary events of Malaysia, The Chef Series at The Datai Langkawi continues in 2022 with the theme *Eclectic Malaysia*. Since its inception, this series has thrilled diners from around the world, with leading talents winging their way to Langkawi Island and showcasing their skills during special dinners, cooking demonstrations, and master classes.

"The Chef Series was originally conceived to bring top chefs to Malaysia, and we've welcomed Michel Roux, Michel and Sébastien Bras, Nils Henkel, and many other acclaimed Michelin-starred chefs from around the world," says General Manager Arnaud Girodon.

During each series, the visiting chef delivers intimate dining events to resort guests, creating

specially crafted menus that not only focus on the providence of ingredients – including sustainable, locally-sourced seafood and poultry, and produce from the resort's Permaculture Garden (*read more on page 58*) – but which embody their unique culinary style and philosophy. Some of the chef residencies are accompanied by cooking demonstrations and a cooking class, where guests are able to enjoy a unique hands-on gastronomic experience under the guidance of these talented chefs themselves.

There's little doubt that The Chef Series has helped put both the hotel and its island home on the local foodie map. "The Datai Langkawi was known as a resort in the middle of the rainforest with an amazing beach and great service, but it was never known as a gastronomic destination... thus, this endeavour to bring chefs in from all over the world and to showcase the resort's culinary credentials, as well as its amazing wine list," says Arnaud.

With Malaysia on lockdown during the global pandemic, the resort team decided to highlight the local dining scene and how it's evolving at the hands of the next generation of talented chefs.

"We started The Chef Series as a yearly event to really lift the profile of gastronomy in Langkawi and also Malaysia and to give people exposure to both leading and emerging chefs. Over the past 10 years, we have seen the development of fantastic F&B concepts across Malaysia, so we decided to run with the theme of *Eclectic Malaysia*, to show a new side to cuisine in Malaysia to both local and international guests," says Arnaud.

The Chef Series 2022 features six local and international chefs with restaurants in Malaysia, each

clockwise from other page:
Nelly Robinson;
Michel Roux; Michel
and Sébastien Bras; Darren
Chin; Nils Henkel and his Sous
Chef Tobias Heldt

THE CHEF SERIES



of whom is at the vanguard of the multicultural country's culinary scene. The visiting chefs, which include Johnson Wong from Gēn restaurant in Penang; Masaki Arakawa from Sushi Azabu in Kuala Lumpur; and Raymond Tham from Beta and Skillet in Kuala Lumpur (*read more about these chefs on pg 18*) not only reflect the diversity of cuisines and cultures, so alluringly characteristic of Malaysia, but also incorporate more recent gastronomic and cultural influences from abroad, with culinary styles spanning traditional, modern and new wave Malaysian as well as creative takes on international cuisine.

"Malaysian cuisine is so eclectic, with so many influences from Chinese, Indian and Malay cuisine, but we also have chefs that are combining these influences with international fare, and then there are others who are preserving recipes that have been all but forgotten, which is very exciting," says Arnaud. "A great example of how we introduce these concepts to our guests on an everyday basis is Chef Chai (*read more about Chef Chai on pg 16-17*), who has worked with many Michelin-starred chefs and has now joined The Datai Langkawi as the Chef de Cuisine of The Dining Room."

Arnaud says the aim of creating The Chef Series was to also show The Dining Room as an eclectic dining destination within the resort itself, a fine-dining fusion restaurant at the heart of the property with a fantastic rainforest backdrop and a calendar of insightful and invigorating dining events that will thrill every gourmand.

"We recognised an untapped opportunity and we have now become known as a gastronomic destination in its own right, giving guests yet another reason to visit us time and time again," says Arnaud.



WEAVING A TALE ACROSS MALAYSIA



Weaving plays an important role in Malay culture, with each basket preserving a timeless culture and a traditional dedication to the arts.

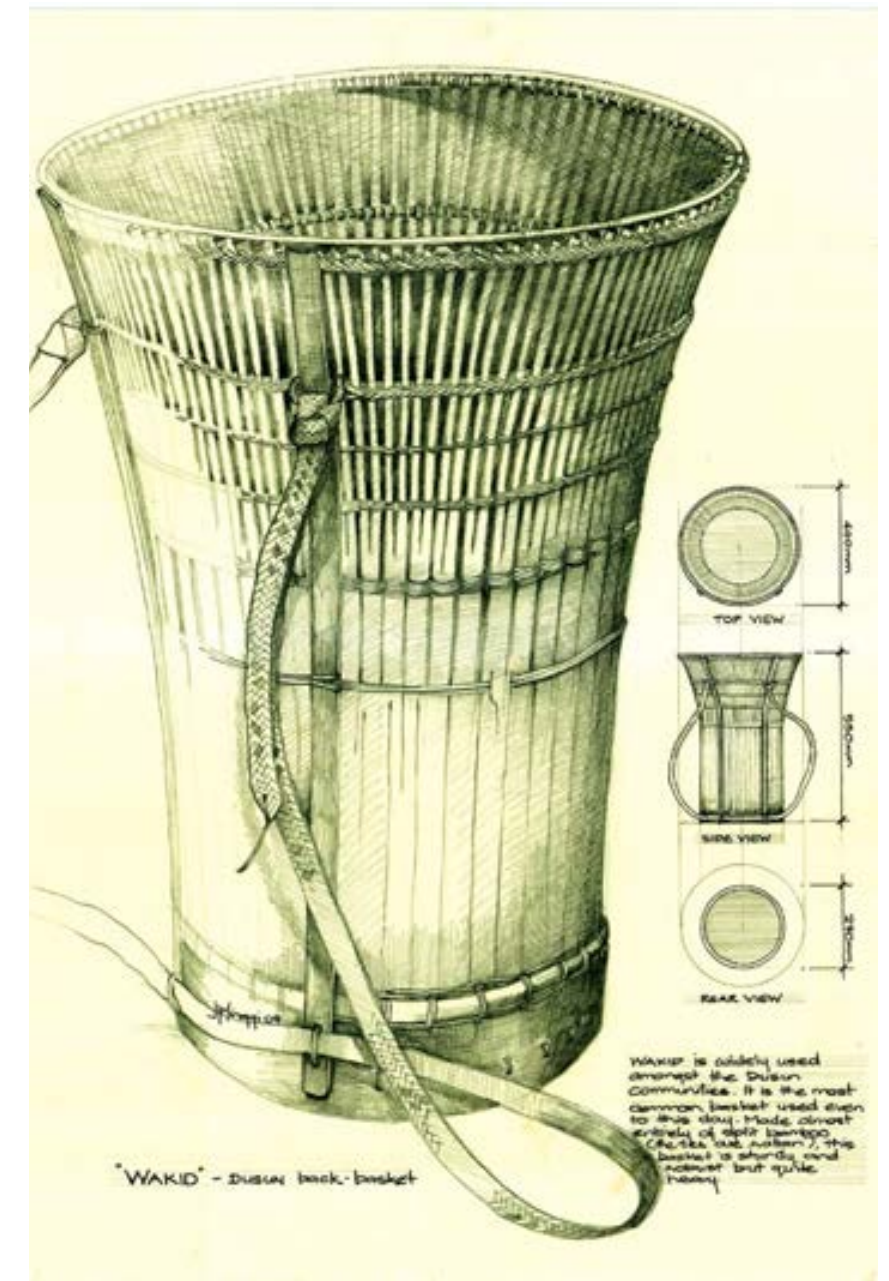
Travel across Malaysia and delve into any local market, and you're bound to find a corner dedicated to traditional weaving. Think towers of stacked, intricate baskets in vibrant yet natural hues and you have the picture. Malaysia's Malay population has a rich weaving and plaiting tradition, with artisans traditionally turning to local ingredients, including pandan, bamboo, rattan and cane, for weaving materials. While many products can be fashioned using this cherished craft, the crowning creations are the baskets, with each telling a small tale from the lexicon of Malaysian culture.

Predominately the domain of coastal communities in Kelantan, Terengganu and Melaka, as well as Borneo in the east, traditional basket



weaving is a painstaking process, which is part of the reason why this craft is under threat, as younger generations fail to pick up the mantle. Leaves and fronds are trimmed and cut into thin strips, then soaked and dried under the baking tropical sun before being dyed, often with the same natural ingredients used for generations.

The fronds are then dexterously woven into mats for homes (a specialty of the state of Terengganu's Malay communities), fans for fending off Malaysia's summer heat, food pouches and covers, and of course, baskets in every shape and size imaginable. Patterns, each of which have a name and origin story, vary from region to region, while colours run the gamut from traditional to strikingly contemporary.



In the case of stiffer, more fibrous bamboo, the preparation process differs slightly. Traditionally used for homewares, including wall cladding, traps and storage containers, strips of fresh bamboo are soaked in water to release the natural sugars, so the resulting construction doesn't attract insects. The strips are then cured over fire, dried in the open air and if required, dyed.

In the cultural heartland of Borneo, baskets are believed to pay homage to the life force of rice, an important staple crop. Motifs used in the production of intricate baskets are thought to be inspired by the spirits. In addition to more utilitarian purposes, like rice harvesting,

from left: Jennifer with the Murut weavers of Kampung Alutok, Ulu Tomani, Tenom; Jennifer's mother, Francisca, stopping at the roadside in Tambunan to speak to a woman carrying a wakid; Wakid, the Dusun bamboo basket is still popular today

The MURUT TAHOL from KG. MALIGAN still make their own baskets for their daily use. Women generally make all the baskets. The most common basket is the bamboo back carrier which depending on its size, is given a different name though, the shape and design is the same. The varied patterns and colours is what makes these baskets special.



KABAN is taking home bamboo poles to be used for making baskets and trays.



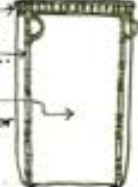
This buyung was made by Bulan the Lupang. The pattern is called "Nilikusiang" meaning river.

TOP VIEW - open top



CIRCULAR KASEAN RIM

SIDE VIEW



KASEAN TRIM & STRENGTHENER

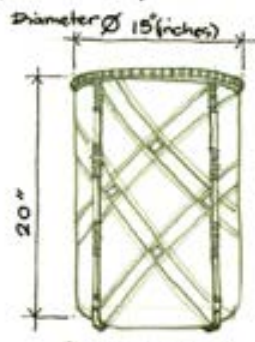
BAMBOO "UMBIL" or "BULUH"

REAR VIEW



Square base

"PANUTUHAN" is the biggest bamboo basket used mainly for storing padi or big items.

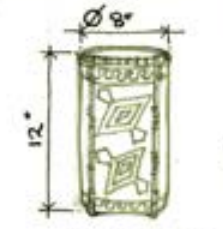


"PANUTUHAN"

"BUYUNG" is the most commonly used medium sized basket. It is also the most colourful and the most ornate in terms of design, colours and patterns.

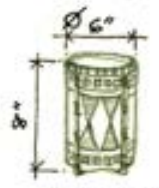


"BUYUNG"



"BUYUNG"

"LINTOYONG" is the smallest type basket which is mainly used to keep 'padi' seeds.



"LINTOYONG" / "TAKINAN"



clockwise from far left:
These Murut baskets are given different names based on the size and usage, although the design is exactly the same; these strikingly colourful Murut Buyung baskets are used daily and also for carrying gifts during wedding ceremonies; some utilitarian baskets are often not dyed; Tapan are Murut bamboo trays used for winnowing paddy or for general tasks in the kitchen

baskets play roles in ceremonial life. For example, the wives-to-be of Dayak tribes in Sarawak weave beautiful bags and baskets to show their skill to their potential in-laws and the baskets are used during wedding ceremonies as a symbol of bounty and prosperity.

While many basket weavers have now turned to nylon to create baskets that are more durable, there are still artisans across Malaysia that delve into the country's forests and coastlines in search of natural fibres, maintaining an art that has stood the test of time for centuries. ■

The Kampung Legacy: A Journal of Sabah's Traditional Baskets
By Jennifer P. Linggi

Sabah-native Jennifer P. Linggi tells the tale of tracing and preserving the traditional weaving culture of Borneo. Exquisitely illustrated with Jennifer's own sketches of traditional basket styles, the book is a homage to the village craftspeople she met and the legacy their art represents. (Read more about her journey on pg 30).

Songket: Malaysia's Woven Treasure
By Grace Inpam Selvanayagam

Written by printed textile designer Grace Inpam Selvanayagam, who also teaches art and art history appreciation at La Salle School of Art and Music in Singapore, her book focuses on the rich, luxurious ceremonial fabric once woven for Malaysian royalty and which has become a cottage industry in Eastern Malaysia.

The Malay Handloom Weavers: A Study of the Rise and Decline of Traditional Manufacture
By Maznah Mohamad

In his book *The Malay Handloom Weavers*, Maznah Mohamad explores the influence of Malaysia's handloom weavers on the economies of Malaysia's eastern states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang, as well as the industry's origins in technology and the people behind it.

SWEET & SPICY

Executive Sous Chef at The Datai Langkawi, Azman Azali, introduces a favourite staple, **Pek Nga**, from his childhood in Kedah to the resort's breakfast line-up.



Visit the hawker stands of Kedah (the state in which Langkawi is located) in the early mornings and you're likely to discover one of the region's most popular breakfast snacks sizzling away on the griddle. Pek Nga, also known as *Lempeng Kelapa*, is a delicate and deceptively simple pancake made from grated coconut that is often eaten with fiery fish curry, coconut sticky rice and even dried fish or simply dusted with sugar for a handy snack on the go. Now Pek Nga has made its way onto the breakfast menu at The Datai Langkawi as Chef Azman takes a walk down memory lane.

"Being a Malaysian, it was my desire to introduce an authentic Malay Kedahan dish to our local city and international guests," says Chef Azman. "Pek Nga is our version of the breakfast pancake - essentially made from wheat flour and coconut - that you can find across the state."

For Chef Azman the pancake is a leaf taken directly from his own childhood. "Pek Nga used to be a breakfast norm back in the day. When I was a young boy, Pek Nga was a special morning staple, especially during big family gatherings and holidays. I wanted to bring back those nostalgic experiences and relive them through the eyes of my guests."

Pek Nga is made with wheat flour, grated coconut, water and salt, forming a batter with the consistency of a traditional pancake.



Hawkers don't bother with recipes or measurements but instead create pancakes as their parents and grandparents did, by estimation or "agak-agak".

At The Datai Langkawi, Chef Azman does away with the water used in traditional Pek Nga and instead replaces it with fresh coconut juice and freshly-grated coconut flesh, all sourced from sustainable local plantations on Langkawi. The result is a light, fluffy pancake packed with tropical flavour.

"Traditionally, Pek Nga is dipped in fish curry," says Chef Azman. "However, for me, a small serving of *ikan bilis* (dried anchovy) sambal accompanying every bite is the perfect morning of indulgence."



A BOON FOR THE DINING ROOM

Chef Chai joins The Datai Langkawi as Senior Chef de Cuisine and brings with him a passion for sustainability, locality and defying culinary conventions.

The newest addition to the resort's culinary team, Chef Chun Boon Chai brings with him an impressive range of experience, including stints working at critically acclaimed restaurants around the globe ranging from two Michelin-starred ABaC in Barcelona to three Michelin-starred Oud Sluis in the Netherlands. Most recently he was the Founder and Head Chef of the acclaimed Copper restaurant in Kuala Lumpur and has now joined the resort to apply his bold gastronomic philosophy on the menus of The Dining Room.



How did your journey to the kitchen begin? Was cooking something you were always interested in?

I have always been inclined to express myself through art since a young age; given the choice to cook as a form of expression, combined with the possibility to travel around the globe - becoming a chef offered the best of both worlds, so the decision was made swiftly.

When you were training as a chef, which classic dishes would inspire you?

Rebelliousness coupled with the need to be different has always been part of my nature. During my studies in Switzerland, we were taught certain fundamental principles like no sharp cheeses with seafood. However, one day I came across a classic Italian dish called vitello tonnato or 'veal and tuna'. Tasting the tuna cheese emulsion paired with veal blew my mind! It was truly a dish that defied rules and logic. It showed me that rules can be broken provided you know what you're doing and that knowing how to engineer a new dish that defies classic rules requires a lot of research and dining experiences to build the flavour memory bank that helps connect the dots.

You've worked for some of Europe's most acclaimed chefs - which had the most impact on your career and personal culinary style?

There are too many great chefs around and every great chef has their own strengths and aspirations, making them who they are. I personally

try to absorb as much as I can from everyone I'm exposed to and see what benefits me best. However, if there is a chef that has impacted me most, I would say it would be a Dutch Masterchef by the name of Sergio Herman, known for his originality, attention to detail, perseverance, tenacity, ability, and courage to showcase the humblest of ingredients - like cucumber - and giving it a three-star uplift.

You've travelled extensively - tell us about some of your favourite meals over the years.

Internationally, Herman's now defunct Michelin-starred Oud Sluis in the Netherlands and chef Alain Passard's L'Arpège in Paris for their brilliant service. Both are unparalleled by any other restaurants I've dined at so far, and the food is exceptional and always bright, flavourful, light, fresh and balanced.

Such a juggle in a multicourse menu with so many factors in play is always memorable. Locally, Restaurant Dewakan for the ultimate indigenous Malaysian product-driven experience and its collaboration projects, which have always been interesting and exciting.

Tell us about your restaurant Copper and what you were hoping to inject into the KL dining scene.

Copper was always meant to be a casual chic restaurant with affordable pricing. We were slightly ahead of our time in doing the unthinkable - a 'dry' restaurant with halal-sourced ingredients and a western setting. Our clientele outgrew what we initially targeted and we became known for our curated menus, delicious food and always reasonable pricing. Eventually, we got labelled as fine dining by the masses and we didn't fight the crowd or their perception, but instead grew with them and never looked back, until Covid-19 happened.

clockwise from this page:
Crispy Puff Wheat Bread; Slow-cooked Oyster Blade; Chef Chai in the resort's garden; Vichyssoise served hot, Catch of the Andaman Sea; Narrow-barred Spanish Mackerel



What's lacking from the Malaysian dining scene and what makes it unique?

A good wood fire concept is the best about Malaysian cooking methods for me; it's the first style of cooking known to man and it's in our DNA to grill. The smoky Maillard reaction is where all the attraction lies for a guest, while for a chef, the attraction lies where we get to hone and manage the fire pits.

What do you hope to introduce to The Datai Langkawi's culinary offering?

At The Dining Room we offer locavore cuisine; inspired by our locality, the terroir of the surrounding Andaman Sea and the bounty it has to offer, the history,

people, culture as well as the strategic location of where we are situated. The cross-cultural influence of the Nusantara period has shaped the cuisine in this region and combined with the use of herbs and spices sourced locally, we create nuances of flavour that aromatise and tease the palate. We do not confine ourselves with a set cuisine but are instead inspired to cook with what's given and the talent available.

We are inspired by the fresh buffalo curd 30 minutes down the road, sweet, tart seasonal pineapples from the hills, organic petite vegetable farmed specially just for us, humanely farmed organic chicken full of flavour and bestowing its essence into *gulai*s and curries, and sweet rock melons and grapes matured generously under the heat of the Andaman sun.

More important than the huge culinary offering we have at The Datai Langkawi is The Datai Pledge and our efforts towards sustainability and the prevention of food and plastic waste, which impacts future generations. We would like our guests to know that we care as we are only one of a few hotels in the world that has set itself very ambitious goals in that area, aiming to make a change. The cuisine stops when we destroy the land and sea that's given to us.

What ingredients and techniques are you experimenting with at present?

Fermentation with protein trimmings; once we are able to standardise the recipe, we will be able to produce and bottle the garums and sell them. Again, I'm really looking into The Datai Pledge to promote zero to little waste and self-sustainability. ■



REDEFINING THE STATUS QUO

As part of The Chef Series 2022, innovative chef-cum-restaurateur **Johnson Wong** of restaurants Gēn and Communal Table in Penang, recently cooked up a storm at The Datai Langkawi.



from top left: Chef Johnson Wong; Flower crab ice cream, topped with T'lur caviar; Stingray accompanied by sweet harumanis mango and tangy tamarind

With this year's theme 'Eclectic Malaysia', it would be hard to look past the talent of young Penang Chef Johnson Wong, who visited The Datai Langkawi in January. Wong, 31, is the creative powerhouse behind two of Penang's avant-garde kitchens, Gēn, a fine-dining Malaysian restaurant that delivers the chef's own interpretation of iconic local combinations, many inspired by his childhood, and Communal Table by Gēn, a more casual setting that showcases the best local produce.

Originally from Johor, Wong studied gastronomy at Le Cordon Bleu in Australia and cut his teeth at a series of lauded restaurants, including Rockpool in Sydney, Joel Robuchon in Macau and two Michelin-starred Noma in Denmark, before relocating to Penang, where he has shaken up the local dining scene with his unapologetically contemporary approach to Malaysian cuisine at Gēn.

The restaurant's bold, intriguing dishes – think chicken wings stuffed with *belacan* (shrimp paste) and paired with local caviar; and heirloom beetroot with sardines and curry leaf - earned it a place on the extended list of the William Reed's Asia's Best Restaurants for 2021.

At The Datai Langkawi, Wong presented a six-course dinner packed with flavour, tradition and innovation that captured the essence of this year's series theme. Highlights included clam broth with rice wine and sawtooth coriander; Flower crab with red chilli, and peanuts; and stingray with harumanis mango and tamarind.

"I love The Datai Langkawi where the abundant island is teeming with fish and wildlife," says Wong. "The magic in Langkawi flavour lies in its seafood, spices and herbs."



A STUDENT OF TRADITION

Another recent talent to descend on The Datai Langkawi as part of The Chef Series - Malaysia, Chef **Masaki Arakawa** of Kuala Lumpur's Sushi Azabu has elevated the capital's Japanese culinary scene.



from top: Omakase dining at The Gulai House with Chef Arakawa; Chef Arakawa preparing Bara Chirashi for guests at the afternoon cooking demo

Helming New York's Michelin-starred Sushi Azabu counterpart in Kuala Lumpur, Chef Masaki Arakawa visited The Datai Langkawi in February to tantalise tastebuds as he presented an omakase menu of authentic Edomae-style sushi laced with 200 years of tradition.

Edomae-sushi derives from Tokyo (once called Edo) and is based around traditional preparation methods used at a time when there was no means of refrigeration for fresh fish. These methods elevate the flavours of the daily catch and are key components to omakase - or 'chef's choice' - menus that focus on using the best ingredients selected by the chef on any given day.

"It's a great honour for me to have been selected to bring 'omakase' to The Datai Langkawi," says Chef Arakawa. "Omakase means leaving your own intentions and preferences behind and submitting to the judgement of others without reservations."

Chef Arakawa, a native of Osaka, learned the traditions and techniques of Edomae-sushi during his tenure at Japanese restaurants in both Australia and Japan. At The Datai Langkawi, he presented a nine-course dinner paired with an exclusive selection of sakes from the resort's own wine cellar, that married timeless tradition with a touch of innovation.



PRESERVING MALAYSIA'S CULINARY HERITAGE

Determined to preserve traditional Malay dishes, **Azli Ahmad** of Kuala Lumpur's OpenHouse showcased Malaysian culinary heritage during his April visit to The Datai Langkawi as part of The Chef Series - Malaysia.

While many chefs forge ahead, endlessly seeking to innovate and evolve classic combinations, Chef Azli Ahmad, a native of Kedah, the state in which Langkawi is located, prefers to focus on the past. At his Kuala Lumpur restaurant OpenHouse, the chef serves traditional Malay fare, carefully created and often intricate dishes that are made with timeless techniques and laced with ingredients sourced from across the country.

Despite a career that has seen him work his way up the ranks in Cape Town and Johannesburg and act as the personal chef of former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, during his 2003 visit to Lesotho, Chef Azli was drawn back to the country of his birth to champion the dishes once cooked by his mother and grandmother.

Driven by his passion for the preservation and elevation of classic Malay dishes, Chef Azli has collaborated with Jabatan Warisan Negara (National Heritage Department), which has curated a collection of over 200 'lost' recipes, gazetting these forgotten finds as aspects of national heritage under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC).

It's from this unique collection that Chef Azli has taken inspiration for his recreated and resurrected dishes at OpenHouse – think braised grain-fed short ribs with saffron, ginger, sultanas and aromatic spices; and silver catfish with fermented durian - and also for his guest appearance at The Datai Langkawi's The Gulai House in April. During the series, diners were offered an opportunity to try fascinating Malaysian ingredients, including Raja Udang Plantain, sea cucumber and *buah ara* (figs).

"Our menu for The Datai Langkawi is a taste of the past brought to the present with a focus on elevating local cuisine into a finer dining experience," says Chef Azli, who sources ingredients from remote jungle communities and works with Langit Collective to purchase heirloom Borneo Highland rice from small plantations.



River Lobster Tempoyak

THE PRODIGAL SON RETURNS

With a background in classic European cuisine and passion for the preparations of his homeland, **Chef Raymond Tham** will present modern Malaysian dishes at The Datai Langkawi in June, as part of The Chef Series 2022.



If you take a look at Chef Raymond Tham's resume, you'll see a chef that's proven to be both passionate and adaptable. He's worked in restaurants in London and Bermuda and worn hats as both a chocolatier at acclaimed cocoa producer Barry Callebaut, and as a lecturer at KDU University College (currently known as UOW Malaysia KDU). However, you can't take Malaysia out of the Malaysian chef and despite a successful career abroad, Chef Raymond succumbed to the siren's call of his homeland; returning to Kuala Lumpur to open Skillet, a casual European fine-dining restaurant, and later Beta, which offers an unashamedly modern take on Malaysian fare.

At Beta, Chef Raymond, a graduate of London's Westminster Kingsway College's School of Hospitality, which was founded by icons Auguste Escoffier and César Ritz, likes to tease classic Malaysian dishes with curious ingredient combinations and techniques – such as inverted curry puffs; poached clams with fermented pineapple; barramundi with candlenut, seaweed, turmeric and betel leaf; and chicken cooked with Bentong ginger – that offer diners both a sense of warm, welcoming nostalgia and also a taste of what could be.

This 17 to 18 June 2022, Chef Raymond will tap into the skills employed at both of his restaurants and into a passion forged by his mother and maternal grandmother during his tenure at The Datai Langkawi as part of The Chef Series 2022 lineup.

"I will create a menu that is inspired by the beauty and surroundings of The Datai Langkawi; the sound of sea waves, the breeze, facing the Andaman Sea," says Chef Raymond.

Diners can expect flavour profiles that are both familiar and unexpected as Chef Raymond pushes the boundaries of Malaysian cuisine and prepares dishes packed with flavour and tradition and laced with ingredients sourced from both sustainable local producers and the resort's own Permaculture Garden. ■



Katsuo



Oyster



A SLOW APPROACH TO LOCAL INSPIRATION

As part of a new approach to in-house mixology, the bar team at The Datai Langkawi continue to innovate, creating delectable cocktails laced with local flavours.

There's a growing movement in Southeast Asia, best seen in its dynamic food and beverage scene. The renewed focus is on *local* – locally-sourced ideas and local creations made from locally-sourced ingredients – and finding new and exciting ways to express and present time-tested concepts and flavour combinations. At The Datai Langkawi, this groundswell can best be enjoyed at one of the resort's bars, where new cocktail menus are packed with regional flavours and intriguing techniques.

"This year we wanted to focus more on sustainability and on promoting local flavours, while embracing childhood memories and paying respect to nature," says Assistant Food & Beverage Manager Zulikernain Rosli (or more fondly known as 'Zul'). "The focus is now on serving cocktails with foraged ingredients that are sourced locally; To that aim, we have created



our own The Datai branded line of spirits, and infused them with herbs and botanicals grown in the resort's Permaculture Garden to recreate flavours known across Malaysia, which is almost impossible to achieve with spirits available in the market."

The bar team is spoilt for choice when it comes to the herbs, roots, fruits and flowers that are core to iconic Malaysian cuisine, thanks to the efforts of the resort's gardeners, but the team still faced the challenge of how to best infuse these flavours into their cocktails. They decided to use a page from the culinary team's book and employ a sous-vide machine.

Sous-vide is the process of cooking food or liquids in vacuum-sealed bags at low heats for long periods, resulting in intensified flavours while preventing vapour and aroma from escaping. At The Datai Langkawi, the bar team, led by Zul and Bar Captain Muhammad Alimi Mat Zuki, use the sous-vide machine to gently infuse the flavours of fresh ingredients into base spirits like The Datai Vodka and The Datai Gin. The method allows less of the raw material – which can include fruit like *kedondong* (June plum) and herbs like *pegaga* (gotu kola) and *daun kesum* (Vietnamese coriander) - to be used to achieve a consistent and intense flavour. This combination of premium spirits with an eclectic array of ingredients that are foraged or sourced from local markets results in cocktails that have one foot in the past and the other in the present.

Inspiring new libations include *Jambu Ayaq* by bartender Megat, a combination of sous-vide jambu air (water rose apple) leaf,



juniper berries and The Datai Gin that is then blended with elderflower, cider and white *asam boi* (preserved plum). Based on the iconic Yunnan tea blend, *Pu'er*, created by Zul, this cocktail combines single malt whisky, pu'er tea and goji berries, which are then infused in the sous-vide machine for three hours before being blended with brown sugar and Bogard bitters, and then finally topped with ginger ale; a twist on the classic *Old Fashioned* cocktail.

Also look out for *Kopi Kampung* by Muhammad Alimi, who sous-vides dark rum with Kopi Cap Gantang from the state of Kedah, star anise, cardamon, brown sugar and orange peel. The infusion is then topped with tonic water in a complex yet refreshing libation that taps into Malaysia's rich coffee culture.

clockwise from left:
Zul mixing one of his signature concoctions; Pu'er; sous-vide method; Kopi Kampung; Jambu Ayaq

FRIENDS IN THE RIGHT PLACES



Thanks to its relationship with global wine suppliers **Frice & Taylor**, The Datai Langkawi has become a distinguished wine destination and one of the few places in Malaysia where you can sip California's most coveted red.

In the wine industry, it's often about who you know. Founded in 1993, in the heart of France and driven by a passion for the world's best New and Old World wines, Frice & Taylor sources, selects and ships the best vino vintages, as well as a curated selection of gins, fine cognacs and whiskies, to private collectors and the world's greatest restaurants, resorts, and major key accounts including The Datai Langkawi. Whether it's rare grands crus from Bordeaux or Burgundy, iconic California cabernet sauvignon, or just the right prosecco, Frice & Taylor taps into its relationships with producers, collectors, and clientele across the globe to source the world's best labels.

One of the wines Frice & Taylor supplies to The Datai Langkawi is Screaming Eagle, which boasts a cult following among lovers of premium cabernet sauvignons.

Founded by Tony Bowden and Jean Phillips, one of Napa Valley's leading real estate agents, and with the help of Heidi Barrett and Gustav Dalla Valle, Screaming Eagle's debut vintage is considered one of the greatest young cabernets ever tasted. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered, and aged in 60% new oak, this Californian red is notoriously difficult to source (the estimate for the waiting list is currently 12 years), which is where friends like Frice & Taylor come in.

Until 1992, the grapes from Screaming Eagle's small, 23-hectare Oakville plot were sold to other Napa Valley wineries. That is until original founder Jean Phillips shared a homemade batch with the winemaking staff at nearby Robert Mondavi Winery. Today, Screaming Eagle wines consistently reach perfect or near-perfect status according to leading wine critics like Lisa Perrotti-Brown of Wine Advocate.

Famed for their layered notes of black fruit, floral, and minerals, vibrancy and depth, the cabernet sauvignons of Screaming Eagle are now produced by Stan Kroenke and Charles Banks, who also owns the Santa Ynez winery in Jonata. They are aided by winemaker Andy Erickson and acclaimed Bordelais consultant Michel Rolland.

At The Datai Langkawi, you'll have a chance to delve into this success story yourself, with the Screaming Eagle 2011, which earned 99 points from James Suckling. The wine boasts touches of spearmint and blackberries on the nose, with a floral, full body with hints of espresso, toasted oak, caramel and dark chocolate. The resort also stocks the Screaming Eagle 2009, which was awarded 98 points by Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, and which is an acclaimed vintage with intensity, depth and elegance through layers of fruit and a seductive finish.



COASTAL CHIC

In a new creative collaboration with The Datai Langkawi, dynamic Malaysian fashion brand **Kapten Batik** has created a resort wear collection inspired by the island's ancient rainforest..

Recognising a shared passion for conserving traditional heritage, attention to detail, and for incorporating elements of nature, contemporary batik fashion brand Kapten Batik and The Datai Langkawi have collaborated on the creation of the Kapten Batik x The Datai collection, a line of resort wear garments presented in a palette of colours – including shades of beige and green – inspired by the ancient rainforest that wreaths the resort.

Designed by one of the talented artists at Kapten Batik to provide guests with supreme comfort without compromising on quality, the new collection boasts the combination of the style Kapten Batik is known for with the brand pattern that is specific to The Datai Langkawi. The pattern itself draws inspiration from the natural shape of plants found in the rainforest at The Datai Langkawi, and is a playful deconstruction of the two shapes in The Datai's 'D' logo to create a leafy graphic. Produced in the timeless tradition of Malaysian batik, with hand-block printing and natural dyes, and using GOTS-certified organic cotton that supports sustainability within the cotton industry, as well as REPREEVE fabric, made from recycled plastic bottles, the new fashion line not only offers guests the perfect all-day garments for Malaysia's balmy weather, but also helps preserve one of Malaysia's most important traditional art forms.

The initial range includes elegant long and short sleeve men's shirts and a women's tunic, as well as tote bags, while Batik and Golf Batik t-shirts made with high performance REPREEVE fabric (made from recycled plastic bottles) will be added later.

THE POTTER AND THE WEAVER

Continuing its Artist-in-Residence series, which showcases artisanal talents from across the region, The Atelier welcomes ceramic artist **Adil Abdul Ghani** and visual artist **Dayang van Wezel-Salim**.



clockwise from this page: Art piece by Dayang entitled 'Waiting For The Call'; 'These Boots Are Meant For Walking' by Dayang; Collage 'Women' by Dayang; Ceramic Art Vase by Adil; Adil moulding clay; Adil and his Ceramic Vase Collection with collectible NFTs

Adil Abdul Ghani

Educated at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak-based Adil Abdul Ghani is the creative powerhouse behind ceramic art brand Raaquu, which was founded in 2020. Adil has a passion for Raku ceramics, a Japanese pottery style first developed in the 1580s that is characterised by the removal of a clay object from the kiln at the height of the firing, causing it to cool very rapidly.

Raku ceramics are revered because of the unpredictability of the firing technique, which combines extreme heat and a reduction process that sees the new ceramic piece placed straight into combustible material – usually sawdust – which is then ignited, causing unique colours to coat the piece.

Adil's works have been showcased in exhibitions across the world, and while he has applied his talents to a variety of pottery styles, it's his Raku pieces, acclaimed for their rainbow patinas and metallic coatings created through this unique process, that have earned him a loyal following. Inspired by nature, Adil taps into the natural world to create clay and grogged earthenware ceramics with mysterious, smoky features in a style that's known as 'painting with fire'.

With 15 years experience, Adil's elegant, awe-inspiring works include everything from unique ceramic art pieces through to tableware, sculptures, home décor, and gifts. Last year he created Raaquu's first Art Series Ceramic Vase collection, which features digital non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and is designed for digital collectors.



Dayang van Wezel-Salim

A Singaporean visual artist and interior designer, Dayang van Wezel-Salim is of Malay and Indonesian heritage and is best known for her visual works which harmoniously combine elements of both eastern and western culture, often in vibrant colours.

Taking inspiration from everyday observations, Dayang produces striking prints that are laced with linguistic and religious themes and which explore the use of colour, texture and form. With a focus on acrylic paint, collage and embroidery art that celebrates the spirit of unity and embodies cultural diversity, her pieces tell the tales of her cross-cultural exposure, which includes years living in the Netherlands and Shanghai.

Determined to explore different art mediums, including traditional art techniques like batik and its Indonesian sibling ikat, Dayang employs natural fabrics and dyes as well as thread to give depth to prints that showcase culture and community, an aspect accentuated by her involvement with Lady Ayaz Group, a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) initiative that empowers refugees through sewing activities.

In addition to her artworks, Dayang also turns her talents to homewares, with many pieces boasting traditional Indonesian ikat pattern in vibrant hues.



WEAVING A WAY TO PRESERVATION



Sabah-born author and artist **Jennifer P. Linggi** is on a mission to save Malaysia's traditional basket weaving culture. She discusses what goes into making these practical pieces of art and how the tradition may be preserved.

What first inspired your passion for traditional arts like basket weaving?

It was more about my frustrations with the lack of proper records or reference material on Sabah's or as it is more well known, North Borneo's traditional culture that sparked the beginning of a long journey, which continues today.

What are the main reasons these arts and crafts are in decline?

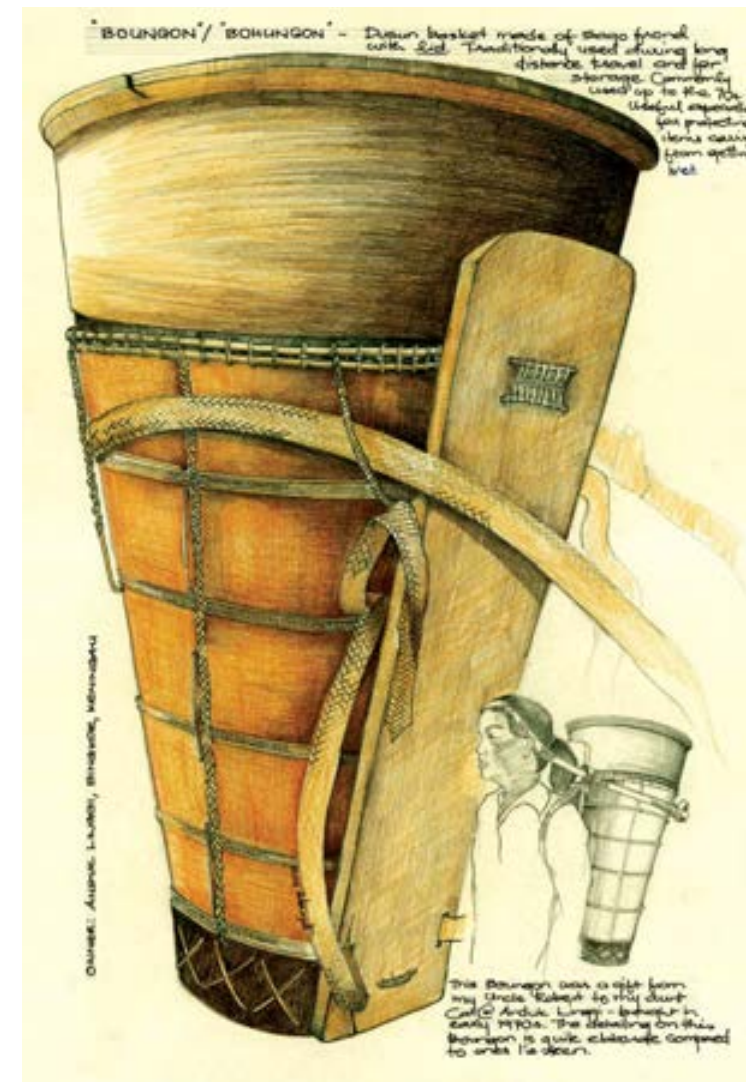
The craftsmen and women I met during my 10-year journey of documenting were nearly all over the age of 60. When I asked if any of their children or grandchildren are following in their footsteps, almost all said, 'No'. Their children associated doing traditional crafts with being old fashioned and choose to go to the cities instead.

clockwise from other page:

Kaban, a Murut weaver from Kampung Maligan, proudly shows the baskets and hats she has been making for an upcoming wedding; Jennifer with Bulan and her family. Bulan and her mother are active weavers in their village; Boungon, a big lidded basket that was commonly used to carry medical supplies and items for long journeys. Sadly, it is no longer being made.



It was this realisation that made me determined to document the crafts (baskets was the starting point) as an attempt to preserve the knowledge in the best way I could, using the method I was comfortable with, which was through drawings. My training as an architect helped me to see the craft objects from a design, as well as a technical viewpoint, which I am grateful for. I would measure the baskets and draw them



to scale. I also hope this will help if someone wants to revive the crafts in the future. I didn't follow a set way of documenting, which was liberating as I was free to draw what excited me and to write stories that I found interesting or touching.

What was your method of research?

I would live with different families in different villages (kampungs) for a few days or weeks as I wanted to see first-hand what the baskets meant to the community. In the first kampung, which was Long Pasia, a remote village, I was thrilled to see that hardly anyone used plastic bags as they all had bamboo or rattan baskets. I would draw while asking many questions. The villagers were only too happy to tell me everything they knew.

I didn't plan to turn my study into a book initially but after visiting many kampungs and hearing the same stories, that there are no young artisans or apprentices continuing the tradition, I knew something had to be done, hence the publication of my book, *The Kampung Legacy: A Journal of Sabah's Traditional Baskets*.

What goes into making these weaved baskets?

So much goes into making a basket, from going into the jungle to collect the bamboo and thorny rattan, to the preparation of the bamboo, which involves applying the colour (natural or commercial dye), to slicing the bamboo, down to the weaving of the baskets, which come in various forms according to their usage. The material preparation, which most people don't know about, is probably the most challenging part. I joined a group of women and men to collect the bamboo, rattan and tree bark (for the dye mixture), and it took us six

hours of going uphill, fighting leeches and slippery trails. Then the women carried the cut-up bamboo on their back baskets and sprinted downhill! That's only the first part of the whole process, so you can imagine why it's unappealing to the young who are used to getting everything conveniently and fast online from Shopee or Amazon.

Where are the best basket-weaving communities based?

The ethnic groups that maintain their tradition of using baskets as a wedding gift carrier such as the Murut and Lundayeh, seem to make the most attractive baskets in terms of colour and motifs/patterns. Thankfully they are still practising the art, and this has kept the basketry tradition alive in their communities. There are some beautiful utilitarian baskets by the Rungus and Dusun ethnic groups, but they are fast disappearing as the baskets were originally used for paddy harvesting; with the paddies now harvested by machines, the baskets are obsolete.

What are some of the most common designs?

There are no common designs which is what makes the baskets special as they are community and function specific. What's even more amazing is there are no drawings or blueprints for craftspeople to refer to. The weavers are genius mathematicians able to create many complicated motifs and patterns by improvising as they weave. Drawing the patterns was hard enough for me, so I take my hat off to them.

Why is it important that these skills are preserved?

Because if we don't, we lose our roots. Our material culture is a reflection of our values as a society and our understanding of our environment. Each society has their own unique culture. I feel without the true appreciation of our society's struggles and creative genius, we are easily swayed by global trends, which in most cases lack substance.

Most importantly, the craftsmen and women must be made aware of the true value of their skill. I repeatedly tell them that we pay willingly for the services of a doctor or the price of an expensive watch because of the years it takes to acquire the



”
I feel without the true appreciation of our society's struggles and creative genius, we are easily swayed by global trends, which in most cases lack substance
“

knowledge. Why is it that we undervalue their work, even though they have often taken their whole adult lives to learn these amazing skills?

What can we, the general public, do to help preserve our culture?

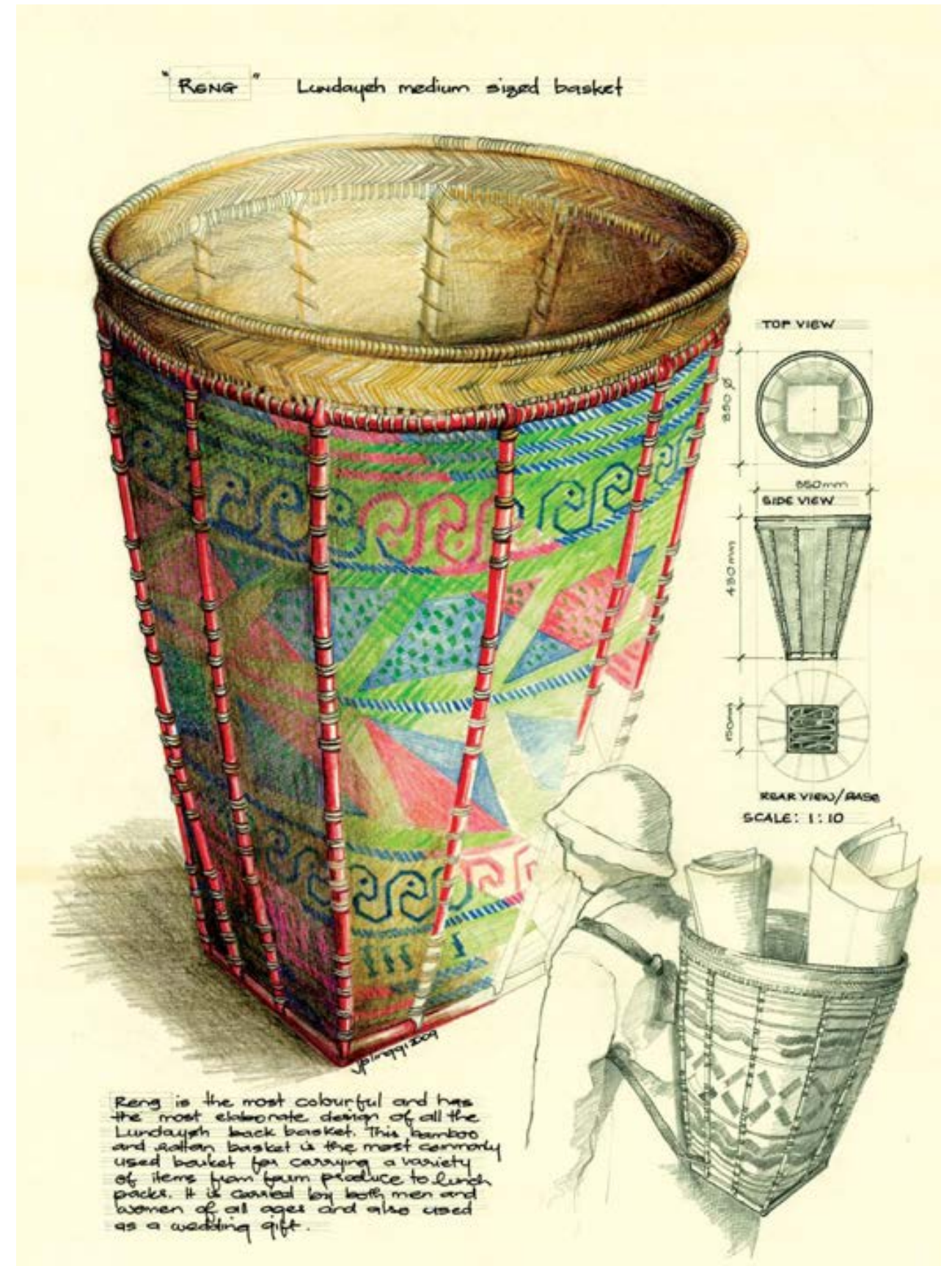
Many people think that it's too late or they believe it's up to the government or NGOs to keep our tradition alive but all of us can play a part. For example, ask yourself what have you done to encourage the production of traditional crafts; do you use bamboo trays or baskets in your house? Do you give out corporate gifts made by local artisans? Do you use local basketry for hampers? When buying handmade crafts, don't ask for a discount. Ironically, we expect discounts from crafts sold at RM20 (US\$4.78) but will not ask for a discount on a branded item worth RM2,000 (US\$478).

In addition, local authorities can encourage the use of traditional elements in public buildings (as opposed to characterless buildings) so locals will take pride in seeing their traditions incorporated, while it will provide an additional draw point for tourists looking to learn about a country's heritage.

Are there any other threatened art forms that you'd like to document and preserve?

Actually, I was in the midst of working on drawings on traditional textiles, but I had to put that to the side when I came to Langkawi in December last year. I stumbled upon the century old traditional houses in Bon Ton Langkawi and immediately thought that these beautiful masterpieces needed to be documented. Narelle McMurtrie, the owner of Bon Ton, had the insight to relocate many traditional buildings from Kedah, Johor, Perak, Melaka and several other states in Malaysia, and to turn them into a resort 25 years ago. In my conversations with her, we agreed that tourism has helped save these precious buildings and many resorts in Malaysia have started doing the same.

I generally draw on location, so if you need to find me just look for an old building! In the process of drawing, one needs to really look and that's where the magic happens; seeing the creativity of our people, no technical drawings, no written instructions... just pure creative genius! ■



from other page:
A weaver slicing the bamboo; Reng, a Lundayeh medium sized basket

A SEASONAL RIOT OF COLOUR

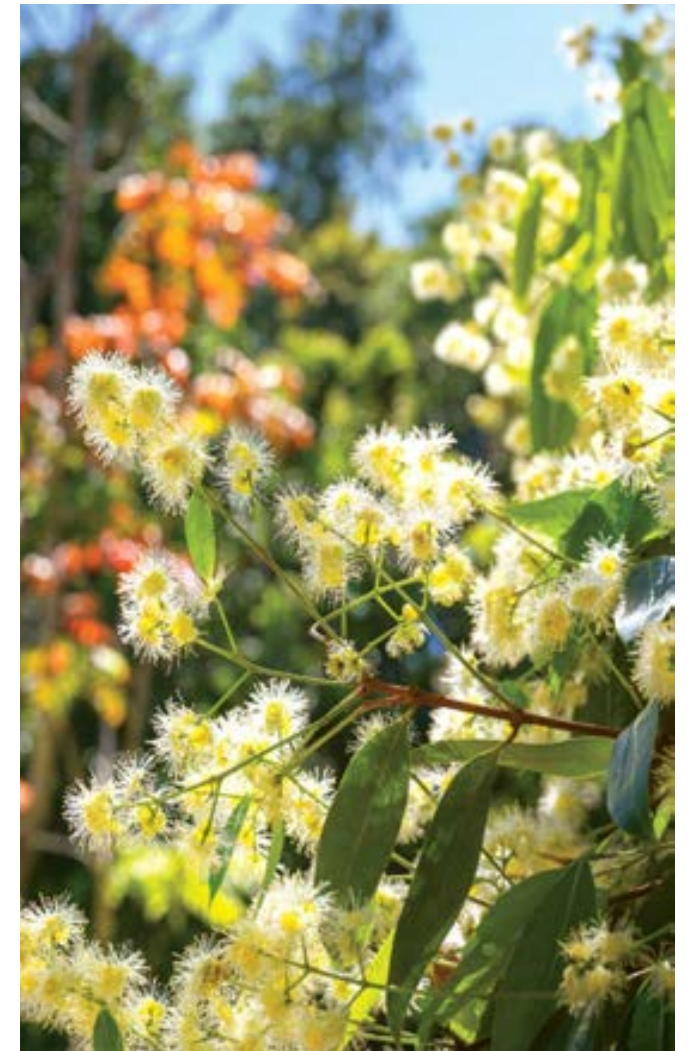
Irshad Mobarak, Head Naturalist at The Datai Langkawi, on his favourite time to be on the island, that of the seasonal Mast flowering.



'Mast flowering' is the phenomenon of massive flowering and fruiting at intermittent intervals that is synchronised within a species across large areas. The term 'mast' comes from the old English 'mæst', meaning a bumper crop.

The months of December, January and February are my most favourite times of the year to be here on Langkawi. We are in the midst of our annual dry season, which usually lasts between two to three months. This season puts a lot of stress on the trees of our rainforest and, this stimulus of very little or no rain triggers the major flowering processes among our rainforest trees. The flowering season is quickly followed by the major fruiting and then the seeding season.

It is a fantastic time to be here on the island as many animals, especially the birds and mammals of our rainforest, choose this



time of the year as the season of love, courtship and nesting.

Incredible as it sounds, in the 36 years that I have been on this magical island, this year's flowering season has been the most amazing! I have had the immense pleasure to experience many mast flowering seasons on Langkawi but I must say this year of 2022, has been exceptional. The forest surrounding The Datai Langkawi is a riot of colours, with many trees of similar species synchronising their blooming times, which is quickly followed by the next species and the next, and even several different species flowering together.

A picture paints a thousand words, so please enjoy this collection of photographs capturing this unique and most beautiful phenomenon.

clockwise from left: Shorea Hypochra or Meranti Temak blooming next to the main pool; Syzygium Campanulatum or Kelat Paya; Bird's eye view of the rainforest canopy with trees masting

SAVING THE HORNBILL, ONE TREE AT A TIME

A key pillar of The Datai Pledge, **Wildlife For The Future** seeks to address the main causes of species extinction, including deforestation, and their impact on the iconic hornbill.

Islands offer wildlife a unique setting in which to evolve and thrive but they also present a unique set of challenges to survival. Factors like disease, fire, storms and especially man-made impacts like deforestation all contribute to extinction of specific species. Deforestation is also the second leading cause of global warming, which in turn is linked to extreme weather fluctuations and flooding, factors that are increasingly taking place on Langkawi. The Wildlife For The Future pillar of The Datai Pledge, led by The Nature Centre Manager, Dev Abdullah (*read more about Dev on pg 44*), focuses on protecting and restoring the natural heritage of Langkawi using a holistic approach and responsible management in partnership with local wildlife experts, Gaia.

Dedicated to wildlife conservation across Malaysia, Gaia is a social enterprise with a particular focus on the conservation of hornbills, making it a natural partner for The Datai Langkawi, home to many hornbills.

“Hornbills are known as ‘Nature’s Gardeners’ because they carry and spread seeds undamaged and help regenerate forests. We need forests as they stabilise the climate, and provide clean air and clean water. Hence, raising awareness is a crucial part of the conservation efforts for this species”, says award-winning Malaysian wildlife photographer and Gaia co-founder Sanjitpaal Singh. “The more people who





clockwise from other page:
The Nature Centre team; Artificial hornbill nesting box; Camera traps in the rainforest; The team of Gaia and Irshad Mobarak observing hornbills; Wildlife road crossing sign erected as part of the programme; Sunda Colugo (*Galeopterus variegatus*); Naturalist tending to seedlings in the Native Tree Nursery



know about the importance of the hornbills and their ecological role and all the efforts made towards their conservation, the better chance we will have to protect this species.”

Many species of hornbills are under increased threat and The Datai Pledge partners with Gaia to develop hornbill habitats and raise funds to help with other Gaia projects, which include the production of education and fundraising material for community outreach programmes as well as the maintenance and care of a fig tree nursery in Kinabatangan, Borneo, which grows a hornbill’s favourite food.

The Datai Langkawi has also created its own Native Tree Nursery, next to the resort’s Permaculture Garden. Resident Naturalists continuously gather seeds that wildlife such as hornbills drop beneath their nests around the resort. These seeds are planted in the tree nursery until they grow into strong seedlings. The seedlings are then replanted in strategic areas in Langkawi’s verdant forests. Working with the Forestry Department of Kedah, who has already donated 1,000 seedlings to the resort, the aim for the Reforestation initiative of the Wildlife For The Future pillar is to plant 100,000 trees around the island, which would not only provide a reliable food source for hornbills and other wildlife species such as small mammals and primates, but also help tackle deforestation, with a focus on creating arching tree canopies over roads as wildlife corridors for arboreal animals to use to forage further.

“We believe that The Datai Langkawi has the right platform and the target audience that we need to engage,” says Sanjit. “In our sessions, we share our

stories about Malaysia’s hornbills; the challenges in conserving them, the importance of conservation photography and other hands-on experiences with guests, with the hopes that more people will come to love and protect our iconic bird.”

Hornbills are threatened by not only deforestation, which reduces the number of trees with natural cavities in which hornbills nest, but also poaching. The Wildlife For The Future programme, in partnership with Gaia, aims to identify natural cavities in trees, while also constructing and deploying artificial nests in trees to create safe nesting opportunities for these precious birds.

In addition, the initiative places road signs in strategic areas to avoid wildlife crossing streets where there are no designated wildlife corridors yet from being killed by motorists; the team at The Nature Centre has also installed 25 camera traps around the rainforest to study animal behaviour, and has developed two adoption programmes – Adopt a Hornbill Nesting Box and Adopt a Tree – which have been designed to raise funds for The Datai Pledge reforestation and wildlife habitat restoration efforts.

“The Datai Pledge engagement helps us provide insights into Langkawi. Their naturalists are very well-versed with the area and the wildlife. They have much to share about their vital observations,” says Sanjit. “Being part of The Datai Pledge also gives us the opportunity to conduct observations, to collect hornbills’ preferred plant seeds and



grow them in the nursery, to enable us to understand the feeding biology of hornbills in Langkawi. Knowing what trees the hornbills need to feed on is important for reforestation efforts.”

“Gaia’s efforts started in Kinabatangan, and it is a project that is always close to our hearts. Now, we have expanded our engagement along the Kinabatangan and Kenyir regions by interacting with and educating multiple local communities about the importance of hornbills. We hope to help encourage the local communities to be proud of and to protect the hornbills; their natural heritage in their very own back yards,” says Sanjit. ■

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KINGS OF THE JUNGLE

One of the most iconic birds of Malaysia, the hornbill is not only a joy to look at, but a crucial species for the overall health of its ancient forests.

Delve into Malaysia's deepest rainforests and you're likely to encounter a plethora of wildlife, from curious primates and mammals to spectacular reptiles and insect life. However, the true king of the jungle for many in Malaysia is the iconic hornbill, a family of bird species found in Asia and Melanesia best known for their elegant, down-curved bill (for which they are named, after the Greek for 'cow horn'), their impressive size, with some like the Great Hornbills growing to over a metre long, and their brilliant plumage. Sadly, several hornbill species, including some of the 10 hornbill species found in Malaysia, are threatened by the impacts of both nature and man.

One of the reasons the hornbills are threatened is deforestation (*read more about this on pg 36*). This is because hornbills do not excavate nests like many other bird species but instead build their homes in naturally formed tree hollows. Once a pair of monogamous hornbills finds a suitable hollow, they will return to the same spot year after year. If a forest has been cleared, the hornbills will not return to nest, reducing their ability to procreate. In addition, poaching, both for body parts and as part of the illegal pet trade, also threatens these magnificent birds, resulting in some hornbill species being listed as critically endangered on the global IUCN - (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species.

You may wonder why hornbills are so important to protect. In addition to their good looks, they're also an important part of the ecosystem. Known as Nature's Gardeners, these large birds are prolific feeders and as they fly, they regurgitate seeds, dispersing them far and wide and allowing forests to regenerate.

Now, the efforts of one Malaysian social enterprise are helping protect these vital birds for generations to come. Gaia is a social enterprise set up in 2015 by two passionate Malaysians, Dr Ravinder Kaur, an Ecology PhD graduate from University Malaya, and Sanjitpaal Singh, international award-winning nature and wildlife photographer. Already well-versed in ecological conservation, Gaia has recently teamed up with The Datai Langkawi and The Datai Pledge to help conserve hornbill numbers on Langkawi.

"From the observations conducted around Langkawi and through interviews with local bird experts, we noted that the hornbill population is dwindling," says Dr Ravinder. "It is becoming less and less likely for people to see hornbills. The lack of sightings is a general indicator that the population is decreasing. Langkawi is well-known for its biodiversity, but the lack of scientific data is a challenge that we need to overcome, so that we can be sure of these claims."

That's where Gaia (which also takes its name from the Greek language, in this

case the earth goddess) comes in. The social enterprise is dedicated to increasing scientific knowledge, implementing conservation actions, and creating awareness of wildlife issues in Malaysia, including the threats faced by the iconic hornbill. Gaia already has established programmes building artificial hornbill nests in Borneo as part of its Kinabatangan Hornbill Project, together with Sabah Wildlife Department and NGO HUTAN.

"Gaia's efforts started in Kinabatangan, and it is a project that is always close to our hearts," says Dr Ravinder. "Our Kinabatangan Hornbill Project with the local community has enabled us to understand this iconic species and replicate the conservation formula in other parts of the country. Now, we have expanded our engagement along the Kinabatangan and Kenyir regions, by interacting with and educating multiple local communities about the importance of hornbills. We hope to help encourage our peers to be proud and to protect the hornbills; their natural heritage in their very own back yards."



© SC Shekar



© Sanjitpaal Singh/jitspics.com



© SC Shekar

In conjunction with The Datai Pledge, artificial hornbill homes will be built and deployed on Langkawi as part of a multi-pronged approach that hopes to increase the number of mating pairs, protect birds from poaching and road traffic, as well as educate local communities about the importance of the hornbill.

"We have found Oriental-Pied Hornbills nesting at The Datai Langkawi," says Sanjit. "In hornbill conservation, the sighting of hornbill nests is always an exciting discovery. They are so hard to find, and the cavities are usually high up in the tree, hidden from sight. Discovering nests gives us hope; it's an indication that the population can recover. We're also excited to find a nesting Great Hornbill in Gunung Raya (Langkawi), thanks to the help of local bird experts (thank you Tom Reynolds) that are willing to share this information with us. Tips like this will enable us to collect more fallen seeds, which we can then grow in The Datai Langkawi's Native Tree Nursery. This will in turn help us determine the nesting season of hornbills throughout Malaysia, which is part of our continuous study."

clockwise from other page:
Great Hornbill in flight; Dr Ravinder Kaur and Sanjitpaal Singh of Gaia; Great Hornbill; Hornbill painting class by Gaia

HERE IN THE FOREST DEEP



Located at the heart of The Datai Langkawi, the villas forming The Rainforest Collection offer guests luxurious interiors and the chance to commune with nature.

While every guest space at The Datai Langkawi, from the suites of The Canopy Collection to the beachfront retreats of The Beach Collection, is beautifully appointed, the villas of the acclaimed Rainforest Collection are most coveted among the resort's regular guests, and for good reason. Wreathed by the ancient rainforest and framed by a flowing stream, each villa is an immersive space that connects travellers with the majesty of the forest.

"The idea from the beginning of their creation was that these villas had to be perfectly inserted into their natural surroundings, without being invasive - to see without being seen," says architect of The Datai Langkawi and the Rainforest Villas, Didier Lefort (founder of DL2A based in Paris). "The relation with the stream is also very delicate; to be close to, but not too close to the water, the depth of which fluctuates with the dry and wet seasons. It is very special."

For Didier, The Rainforest Collection offered a chance to develop luxurious accommodation that fit seamlessly into the natural surroundings, and to provide a deep connection with the tropical forest, together with its incredible flora and fauna. The Rainforest Pool



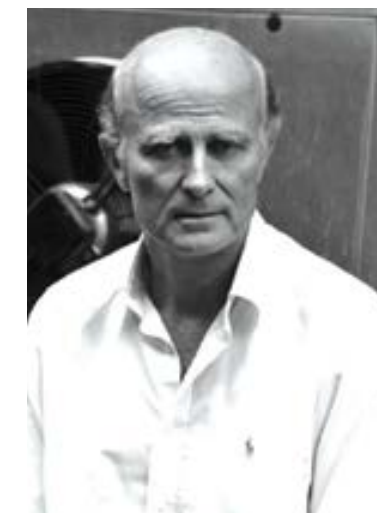
Villas add to that magical atmosphere along a natural stream.

"Through these traditionally designed villas, in these unique locations, guests can be front row spectators of natural life and understand it better. This is the best place to experience a deep and personal immersion into nature; one of the key elements unique to The Datai Langkawi."

However, The Rainforest Collection villas, which include Premium and Pool villas, offer more than just a great location beneath a towering canopy. They are also sumptuous spaces, with expansive living areas outside and within, that allow guests to dictate how they would like to interact with the natural world around them.

"Inside the rooms, the atmosphere is still very cosy and comfortable, with a mix of natural materials like timber floors and roof structures, which contrast with modern elements like steel and *corian* for the bathroom," says Didier.

Each villa boasts a king-size bed or twin beds dressed in Egyptian cotton linen, a large daybed, writing desk, vanity table and a spacious bathroom. The Rainforest Premium



clockwise from left: a Rainforest Villa; the Rainforest Pool Villas offer serenity and a private plunge pool; the collection was designed by Didier Lefort; the villas also feature expansive bathrooms.

Villas feature balconies perched above Sungai Datai River, while Rainforest Pool Villas offer the indulgence of a private, sustainably heated 10-metre swimming pool.

"It's very unique to work on a site which allows guests to be so isolated within nature, and yet so close to all amenities and facilities of the hotel," says Didier. "Guests have the luxury of both being privately away on their own but to also be a part of all The Datai Langkawi activities with other guests."

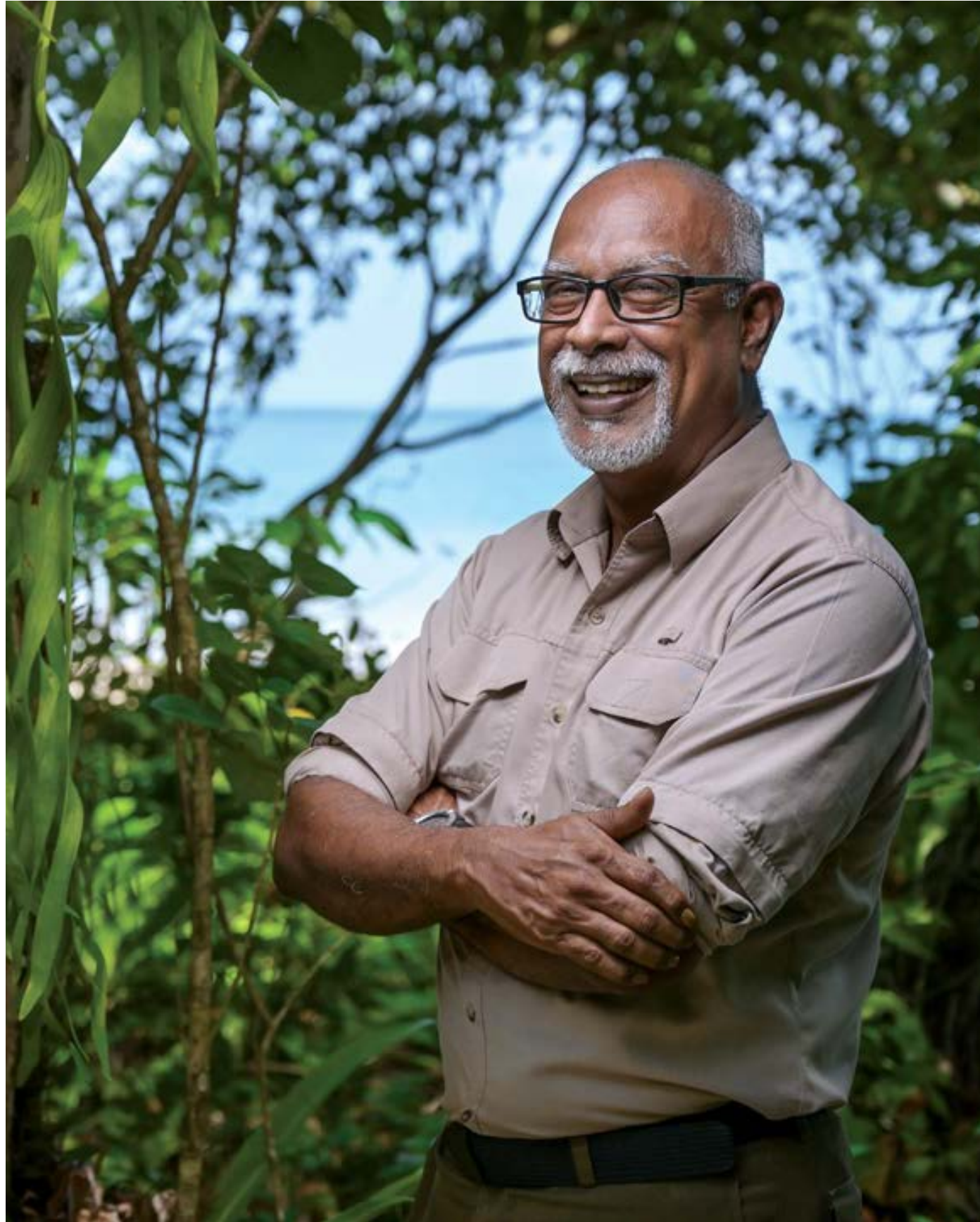
COME IN, THE WATER'S WARM



Next time you take a dip in a swimming pool at The Datai Langkawi, and enjoy the warm embrace of the water, you'll be able to do so safe in the knowledge that the property's pools are part of an all-encompassing initiative to reduce energy use and carbon emissions.

The heated pools at The Datai Langkawi - including those of the Rainforest Pool Villas - are heated using a system that generates 30-50% energy savings compared to conventional electric heaters, according to Agus Rida, Executive Director of Engineering. In addition, the cold air produced by the heat pump can be used to cool the pump room and equipment without producing any carbon emissions.

"A heat pump system like this is a great alternative when sources of renewable energy are not available, and when a pool still requires electricity to produce heat," says Agus. "The result is a warm pool and happy guests with less energy consumption and zero carbon emissions," he adds.



“SEEING THE TREES FOR THE FOREST”

Veteran conservationist, The Nature Centre Manager and Pillar Leader of the Wildlife for the Future pillar of The Datai Pledge, Dev Abdullah discusses early inspirations and his ongoing mission to preserve the environment of Datai Bay.

You’ve worked as a naturalist at several resorts before joining The Datai Langkawi. What inspired this career, and have you always had an interest in the natural world?

One of my biggest inspirations is Irshad Mobarak, Resident Naturalist at The Datai Langkawi, who first taught me birdwatching. And then came David Bellamy, whom I watched on television since I was 15 years old. It wasn’t until I met Dr Bernard D’Abrera, referred to as one of the world’s best-known lepidopterists (butterfly specialists) as a young budding naturalist, that I began to see the importance and urgency of conservation.

You recently returned to The Datai Langkawi, where you worked in the 1990s, as the new The Nature Centre Manager. How has the guest versus natural experience changed in that time?

It’s great to see how conservation work is now blended into guest experiences, thanks to a bigger team with well-trained full-time naturalists and marine biologists to do specialised work, as well as the resort’s increased commitment towards the welfare of the environment.

Preservation and conservation are close to your heart, and you were previously Environment Manager at the Sultan Ahmad Shah Environmental Trust. What can you tell us about the Trust and its projects?

During my tenure with the Trust, we managed to plant up to 300,000 trees with the help of school students and volunteers, and raised awareness in almost all districts of Pahang. I also had a hand in turning a valuable piece of land into a wildlife corridor, connecting two very important wildlife and forest reserves.

You are the Pillar Leader for The Datai Pledge’s Wildlife for the Future initiative – what does this pillar focus on and what projects are you currently overseeing?

One of the most important endeavours is our Corridor for Life project, which includes a Reforestation Initiative and Native Species Propagation

Project. This comprises a native tree nursery project, a tree adoption programme and tree planting, as well as a focus on supporting native species that may be endangered, which includes wildlife data recording and a dog spaying programme.

How important is this pillar to the overall efforts of The Datai Pledge and for the environment of The Datai Langkawi?

Extremely important. The welfare of Datai Bay depends upon the welfare of the trees surrounding it.

It takes more than being a passionate conservationist to make a lasting impact on the environment – budding naturalists need to aim at being multi-disciplined and versatile as this is vital to conservation work. More often than not, prioritising an environmental management system helps us ensure we remain methodical and focused. With the Wildlife for the Future programme and its many initiatives such as tree planting, wildlife monitoring and building of the native tree nursery, and a lot of hard work with the team, we can continue to preserve and regenerate the undeniable beauty of this island.

What experiences does The Nature Centre offer that guests might not be aware of?

Not many are aware of the time taken for research and study that goes into every activity before it is implemented. Lots of thought for the educational aspect, the safety of guests, and research on the activity and environment itself is carried out before it ticks all boxes to become a new nature activity for guests.

Is The Nature Centre more than just a base of information and tours of the rainforest? What else is this unique place involved in at the moment?

In addition to the many interactive experiences The Nature Centre offers guests of The Datai Langkawi, it’s also an area for research and development, the results of which help guide our conservation, environmental policies and activities going forward.

The Datai Langkawi offers an unprecedented natural world immersion for guests; how is this experience received by guests from abroad?

With all the development that is done at the resort, first and foremost the focus is always on how experiences and activities will impact the environment. A lot of the travellers who stay here have said how well we’ve preserved the environment. This is something we are very proud of and hope to retain for many years to come.

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Faizy Crystal, located at the Langkawi Kraft Complex, captures the natural beauty of the island through stunning blown glass works.

There are many keepsakes you can take home with you after a visit to beautiful Langkawi Island, but few capture the colours of this paradisaical destination quite like hand-blown crystal.

Crafted from sand and metallic oxides, the breathtaking pieces manufactured at Faizy Crystal are the creation of founder Kamarul Faizy Roslan who, after studying art at MARA Technology University in Shah Alam, then pursuing his higher education in New Zealand and excelling at hot glass, relocated to Langkawi, where he became mesmerised by the deep



Recycled ornamental baubles created by Faizy from the resort's crushed glass bottles

greens of the rainforest and the turquoise hues of the surrounding seas.

His workshop, which was opened in 2003 on the island's north coast, is a hive of activity as the glass is heated in a furnace at 1,400 degrees Celsius, turning it by hand into a shimmering molten liquid that captures light like a flowing prism, as it waits to be shaped into the award-winning company's elegant perfume flacons, jewellery and paperweights.

Beyond the workshop, visitors will find a boutique that showcases Faizy's many creations, which range from graceful figurines and vases to delicate floral arrangements, candle holders and table pieces, presented in a rainbow of hues.

At The Datai Langkawi, Faizy is one of the resort's principal artisans who upcycles glass from the resort to create many beautiful items, including Christmas ball ornaments and animal figurines.

FARM TO TABLE, LANGKAWI STYLE



from left: Genovese Basil microgreens; Hydroponic method

With nearly perfect year-round weather and miles of open space, one might think that Langkawi would never have a shortage of farm fresh produce. However, not all local produce thrives in Langkawi's tropical climate, and subsequently much of it has to be ferried in from the mainland. This became especially problematic during the pandemic-fuelled travel and import restrictions, which created shortages of certain fresh vegetables that were at the top of the list for local chefs and foodies.

However, they say every cloud has a silver lining, and it was this challenging time that gave birth to Langkawi's Kebun Republik, a pesticide-free, hydroponic

farm. Four friends, two of whom own and operate a Langkawi restaurant and hotel, decided to pool their resources and tackle the problem head on. Jacky How and Karina Bahrin, of fatCUPID Restaurant and La Pari-Pari Hotel partnered with Shareen Rahmat and Chin Ting Chua to become hydroponic farmers, despite none having any previous agricultural experience.

Jacky How, a well revered chef herself, is particularly sensitive to the issues of supply and demand of quality produce in Langkawi, even during non-pandemic times. She prefers to use only the freshest of ingredients at her restaurant and quickly

clockwise from this page:
 Crops transferred to growing racks; Burrata served with microgreens at The Datai Langkawi; Australian pasture-fed lamb rack with microgreens; Catch of the day grilled whole fish; Jacky How, Karina Bahrin, Chin Ting Chua and Shareen Rahmat; Kebun Republik, with its pesticide-free crops



created a local following among other operators, including the culinary team at The Datai Langkawi.

Initially growing a variety of local favourites, such as Kailan and Bok Choy, Kebun Republik decided to focus their efforts on a selection of leafy greens and herbs that were more difficult to get fresh in a timely manner. Baby Romaine, Mizuna Red Lettuce and Genovese Basil are just a few of the more than 10 types of greens, microgreens and herbs that Kebun Republik now successfully produces. By delivering locally, they only harvest produce as needed, ensuring that everything they ship out is plucked only hours before it is received.

Kebun Republik uses indoor cold room and outdoor hydroponic farming methods. The process looks simple enough, however there is a significant degree of science involved. Simply put, single seeds are sown individually in sponges, which have proven to be one of the best mediums for water absorption. Once the plants have grown long enough roots and produced shoots, they are then transferred to growing racks, where they remain during the plant's growth cycle until they are harvested.

The growing medium in hydroponic farming is water, but the water needs additional nutrients to replace what would normally be available from typical, soil-based horticulture. Each stage of hydroponic process requires different nutrients as well as different water levels in an exact science that produces consistently excellent produce.

Kebun Republik's crops begin their life cycles in the climate controlled cold room. Only those plants capable of tolerating Langkawi's balmy climate, including basil and mint, are transferred to the outdoor growing area. The plants require daily monitoring of temperature, humidity, water levels, nutrients, and lighting to ensure maximum growth potential.

Kebun Republik's motto is 'In Food We Trust', a mantra built on the team's belief that food is medicine; having the



ability to trust food sources is an important factor in how the four founders run their farm. The hydroponic farm is living proof that producing food that is free of pesticides and excess chemicals is a win-win for both consumers and the environment.

"But beyond just trying to play our part in strengthening the local food supply chain, we also know that producing things locally will have a direct positive impact on carbon footprint reduction," says Karina Bahrin. "Our veggies don't have far to travel, as our market is only Langkawi. Our presence also means folks here now have a source for temperate climate

vegetables that are harvested the same day, instead of grocery store produce that is often already close to five days old once it reaches Langkawi."

Apart from producing its own crops, Kebun Republik also wants to encourage the greater community to do the same, and the founders work with locals to provide Langkawi with a greater variety of pesticide-free, fresh produce. Knowing that many Langkawi farmers are hindered by limited resources and focus primarily on growing their traditional produce, which includes corn, durian, mangos, squash, watermelon, pineapple and sugar cane, Kebun Republik strives to utilise its own network of customers to help these farmers fill their marketing gaps. So far, the company has expanded its networking umbrella to include two other suppliers, who are now providing hydroponic Asian greens and microgreens.

The Datai Langkawi's culinary team was quick to take advantage of Kebun Republik's ultra-fresh, pesticide-free produce to ensure hotel guests continue to be served only the best. By ordering salad greens and microgreens twice weekly, the resort keeps their salad bar and garnishes fresh and flavourful, as well as extra healthy. ■



A TALE OF SCORCHED EARTH

An untimely death, a lingering curse, and an invading army are the key components of one of Langkawi's most popular folklore tales.

clockwise from this page:

Location of Field of Burnt Rice at home of Ku Halim bin Ku Hassan in Kampung Raja, Padang Matsirat, Langkawi; Entrance to The Field of Burnt Rice; The historical site marking where local villagers burnt all their rice stores.



Langkawi is an island where fact and fiction exist hand in hand, and where myths and legends linger like the mist that clings to the island's peaks. Many of these ancient tales are also interconnected. A case in point is the story of Mahsuri binti Pandak Mayah – known simply as Mahsuri – probably the island's most endearing story, and the curse that befell Langkawi after her death.

Mahsuri was a young wife, originally from Phuket, who was accused of adultery, while her husband from Langkawi, Wan Darus, was abroad fighting the Siamese. The villagers of Padang Matsirat, influenced by insidious neighbours who were jealous of her beauty (including the chief's wife Mahora), insisted that she be punished for her crime, and she was subsequently tied to a tree and put to death with her father's own keris (a ceremonial blade). With her dying breath, Mahsuri is said to have cursed Langkawi for seven generations, which leads us to the next story.

It wasn't long after Mahsuri's death that the Siamese Army invaded Langkawi in 1821, and the village of Padang Matsirat, as the island's rice bowl and seat of power, was a prime target of their ambitions. As the Siamese approached, the army chief



of Langkawi, Datuk Panglima Hitam, encouraged the farmers to go out to their fields and harvest the region's plentiful rice crop as quickly as they could. As the farmers returned with their overflowing carts, Hitam ordered a large pit to be dug in a field in nearby Kampung Raja, and there all the crops were burnt so that they would not fall into the hands of the enemy. In addition, Hitam is said to have directed all the wells to be poisoned.

However, in the end, whether it was just the determination of the Siamese Army or the influence of Mahsuri's dying curse, the enemy arrived and destroyed the town. Today, despite the belief that Mahsuri's seven generation curse has now been lifted, when it rains heavily, charred rice is still said to rise to the surface of that protected paddock in Kampung Raja, which is now known as *Beras Terbakar* or The Field of Burnt Rice.





THE BEST DIVING FROM ACROSS MALAYSIA

Malaysia offers some of the region's best marine biodiversity, ensuring that explorers below the waves are always well rewarded.

Anyone who has visited The Datai Langkawi and its breathtaking jungle-clad island home will testify to Malaysia's stunning beauty and awe-inspiring wildlife. However, the country's natural assets extend to its surrounding seas, with extensive coral gardens offering some of the best scuba diving in the world. From Peninsular Malaysia to remote islands off the coast of Borneo, Malaysia is home to captivating dive spots, wrecks, reefs and marine life just waiting for your next visit. Here are some of the top dive destinations from across the country.

SIPADAN AND MABUL

Two destinations often whispered together by avid divers, Sipadan and Mabul are a pair of idyllic islands located in a protected marine environment off the north-eastern tip of Borneo. This remote region was made famous by French explorer Jacques Cousteau in his 1989 documentary, *Ghosts of the Sea Turtle* and has been a favourite with divers from around the world ever since.

Famed for its turtles, sharks, rays, and impressive biomass, which ranges from Bumphead Parrotfish and Porcupine Pufferfish to Moorish Idols, Clown Triggerfish and Unicornfish, Sipadan is a favourite with diving diehards looking for pristine waters and new encounters at every turn.

Alternatively, nearby Mabul is best-known for its critter diving, making sites like Froggy Lair - home to Crocodile Fish, a variety of scorpionfish and Dragonets - popular with underwater photographers and ensuring you'll spend hours hovering above vibrant reefs watching the life of their marine residents play out below.

SIBUAN ISLAND

An alternative to Sipadan and Mabul is Sibuan Island, which is located to the north, within the Semporna Marine Park. This tiny tropical isle is another popular dive site for 'muck diving',



thanks to its white sand, calm conditions and variety of tiny marine life, which runs the gamut from Mandarinfish and Hammerhead Nudibranchs, through to Pygmy Seahorses, Black Urchins, and Frogfish. The Dropoff is a popular site for divers looking to go a little deeper. Diving is good year-round except during the December-January monsoon period.

REDANG ISLAND, LANG TENGAH AND PERHENTIAN

Located within the celebrated Terengganu Marine Park, off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, Redang Island is accessible from Kuala Lumpur and offers great diving conditions. At seven kilometres long, it is also one of the largest islands on Peninsular Malaysia; a seamount encrusted with coral gardens down to 30 metres, one of its drawcards is its abundance of larger pelagic species, which include reef sharks, manta rays, tuna, Barracudas and even whales, all attracted by the swift currents. You'll also find turtles and plenty of tropical fish species. Diving is best

between March and October, outside of these months there are strong winds due to the monsoon season.

Located to the west, another great dive spot is little Lang Tengah Island, an idyllic spot that's as popular with sun-worshippers and backpackers as it is with divers. The island is ringed by abundant reefs with fantastic visibility and great dive spots up to 30 metres. Look out for snapper, rabbitfish, reef sharks, fusiliers, Malaysian Giant Turtles and Shovel-nosed Rays.

Another nearby neighbour is Perhentian Island, which is actually two islands – Perhentian Besar (Big Island) and Perhentian Kecil (Small Island). A popular spot with nesting turtles, both islands offer divers encounters with octopus, reef sharks, stingrays, Yellow Boxfish and graceful schools of Barracuda, as well as vibrant reefs packed with colour and activity. For more advanced divers there's the Sugar Wreck, which sank during a monsoon in 2000 and has quickly become a popular home for bamboo sharks, jacks, trevally and snapper.

clockwise from top left: Sipadan is famous for their sea turtle sightings; up close with the reefs of Mabul; stunning Redang Island

LANKAYAN ISLAND

Another gem located off the east coast of Borneo is Lankayan, a tropical paradise that's popular with divers looking to get far from the beaten path. An ideal spot for divers of all skill levels, Lankayan offers a less crowded alternative to the likes of Sipadan but won't disappoint in terms of diving experience. There are coral reefs protected within national marine parks, as well as wrecks that will fascinate, including one that once belonged to the Mosquito Fleet, the anti-submarine forces of the Japanese Navy. If you plan your trip for April and May, you're likely to spy magnificent Whale Sharks, as well as resident Ghost Pipefish, Black-tip Reef Sharks, octopus and cuttlefish, bamboo sharks, and porcelain crabs.



LAYANG LAYANG

Located 300 kilometres to the north of Sabah, and part of the 600-strong Spratly's Islands between Borneo and Vietnam, the 13 coral atolls of Layang Layang lie in water 2,000 metres deep, making it another spot popular with large pelagic fish, including schooling fish, turtles, and Leopard Sharks. The tiny island is also home to healthy reefs and great coral walls, which will reward divers who make the effort to reach this remote locale. Layang Layang is said to be home to some of the healthiest reefs in Malaysia, with visibility often exceeding 40 metres. Time your visit for April or May and you'll be greeted by massive schools of mating Hammerhead Sharks.



TIOMAN ISLAND

Also located off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, Tioman is famed for its white sand beaches, crystal clear



water, and easy diving. The currents that flow around the vibrant coral blooms of Tiger Reef draw interest from large schools of jacks, Barracudas, and Rainbow Runners, while you'll also spy Lionfish, scorpionfish, moray eels and spotted stingrays in the shallows. A higher access cost means you'll often have the reefs all to yourself! ■

clockwise from top:

A lionfish at Langkayan Island; Tioman Island is loved by divers for its coral gardens, which includes Tiger Reef; the intrepid can dive on WWII wrecks at Lankayan Island; all of Malaysia's top dive spots offer divers unique marine life encounters.



AN EYE FOR NATURE

One of the world's most acclaimed wildlife illustrators, artist **Choo Beng Teong** captures the natural world of The Datai Langkawi to perfection in the resort's Nature Guidebook.

Next time you're in your guest room, suite or villa at The Datai Langkawi, pause for a moment to discover the island's remarkable wildlife residents through the enduring talents of one of the world's finest nature artists, Choo Beng Teong, whose drawings and illustrations grace the resort's comprehensive Nature Guidebook.

A native of Penang, Choo studied art at the Sain Academy of Art as well as at the Universiti Sains Malaysia and is acclaimed for his ability

to capture wildlife in intricate, lifelike detail. His pieces have been auctioned at the likes of Christie's in London (South Kensington Wildlife Art auction), as well as The Edge Galerie and Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers in Malaysia. Choo's works can be found on permanent display at the Universiti Sains Malaya Art Gallery. He is also a regular illustrator for the Malaysian Nature Society and two of his paintings of sea turtles have been featured in the design of

official Malaysian stamps. Although Choo has a soft spot for the diverse birdlife of Malaysia, many of which are famed for their vibrant plumage, his repertoire of works include flowers, butterflies and plants, making his vibrant, detailed watercolours the obvious choice for The Datai Nature Guidebook, which offers guests deeper understanding of the mesmerising flora and fauna of the resort.

"It was an exciting experience working on the Nature Guidebook at The Datai Langkawi. The Datai Langkawi has a rich biodiversity that includes many species of animals that are not found anywhere else in the world," says Choo. "During my stay at The Datai Langkawi, I managed to observe and photograph many birds and mammals such as the Brown-winged Kingfisher, Brahminy Kite, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Sunda Colugo, Black-giant Squirrel and Dusky Langur. There are so many nature photography opportunities around the vicinity of the resort. I also met many wonderful people during my stay there. It was really a fantastic experience that will remain in my memory forever."



BIRDS OF MALAYSIA IN WATERCOLOUR: THE ART OF CHOO BENG TEONG

Celebrating Choo's talents and passion for nature, his spectacular book *Birds of Malaysia in Watercolour* takes readers on a unique journey into the country's avian biodiversity thanks to exquisite paintings of 124 species, interspersed with short bites of text that give additional colour and context. *Birds of Malaysia in Watercolour* is a testament to the ways in which the intense observation inherent in both art and science reveals the mysteries of the natural world. At once a book that showcases art as well as an aesthetic call for education and conservation, Choo's book has been described as love letters to the species closest to his heart, the birds of Malaysia, and will enchant the ornithologist in every nature lover.



Choo Beng Teong at The Atelier of The Datai Langkawi surrounded by his artwork



from left:
Ruddy Kingfisher;
Sunda Colugo; the
stamps showing
Choo's sea turtle
illustrations



Belimbing buluh
(scientific name: *Averrhoa bilimbi*)

THE CONSTANT GARDENER

A key component of The Datai Langkawi's environmental and sustainability programmes, the Permaculture Garden takes its cues from Mother Nature.

Next time you're digging into a delicious dish at The Gulai House, such as *Kerapu Masak Lemak Cili Berapi* (simmered grouper fish in spicy turmeric gravy) or *Udang Raja Karipole* (mild spiced tiger prawns tossed with cashew nuts, curry leaves and creamy chilli gravy), spare a thought for the journey its ingredients have taken. In the case of The Datai Langkawi, the source of that fragrant turmeric or fresh ulam raja is likely to be closer than you think.

A key component of the resort's core environmental ethos, the expansive Permaculture Garden is dedicated to and in tune with the systems and cycles of nature. Created as a closed system loop that generates no waste, while producing ingredients for the resort's kitchens and spa, The Garden harmoniously combines water and waste management (including worm farms

for composting), community development, recycling and permaculture and is arguably one of the most important on-going projects at The Datai Langkawi.

Design consultant Mark Garrett, a permaculture specialist that spearheaded the project, has more than 20 years' experience helping companies and communities better align their goals and needs with Mother Nature. So inspired by a documentary he watched back in 1985 that he dug up his concrete driveway and ringed his house with trees, Mark studied Permaculture Design under Bill Mollison, the Co-founder of Permaculture, and has helped clients around the world change the way they interact with their natural surrounds.

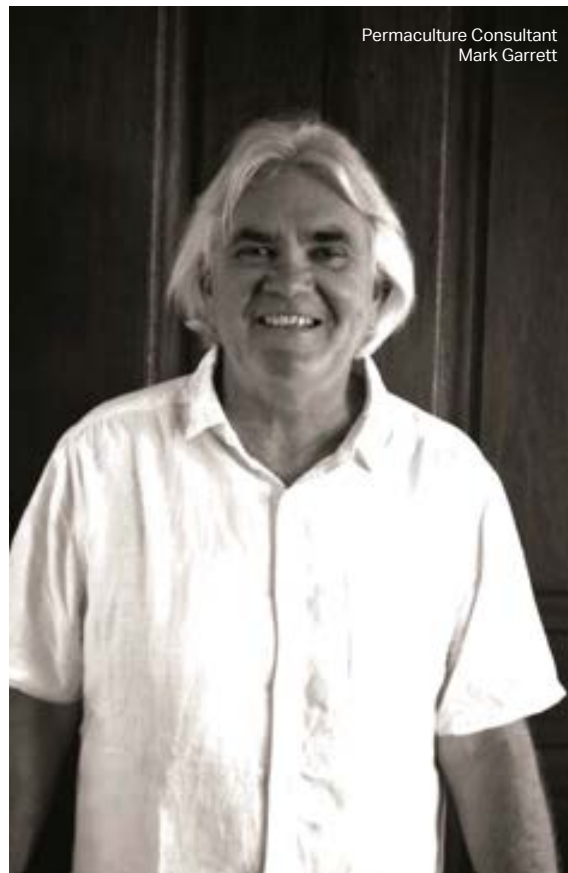
"The benefits of permaculture are far reaching, from learning to grow and produce clean chemical-free food and water, to reducing dependence on

fossil fuels,” says Mark. “The culmination of multiple benefits is the independence and control people have over what they eat and drink, and the reduction in daily energy costs. Permaculture offers a healthier life for communities and a chance to play a direct part in mitigating the effects of climate change.”

At The Datai Langkawi, Mark worked with Remi Giromella, Director of Quality Control and Improvement, and his team to develop a verdant garden that provides bounty for the resort without polluting or exploiting natural resources. More than just a source of local herbs, the Permaculture Garden has an educational element as well, with an outdoor classroom that caters to both hotel guests and local communities; while the Organic Wealth Centre focuses on composting organic matter, including food waste, and returning vital nutrients to the earth as part of a closed loop system. In addition, The Garden boasts its own bee hives, which help pollination while also producing honey that’s then used at the resort.



A Jackfruit growing in The Garden



Permaculture Consultant
Mark Garrett



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