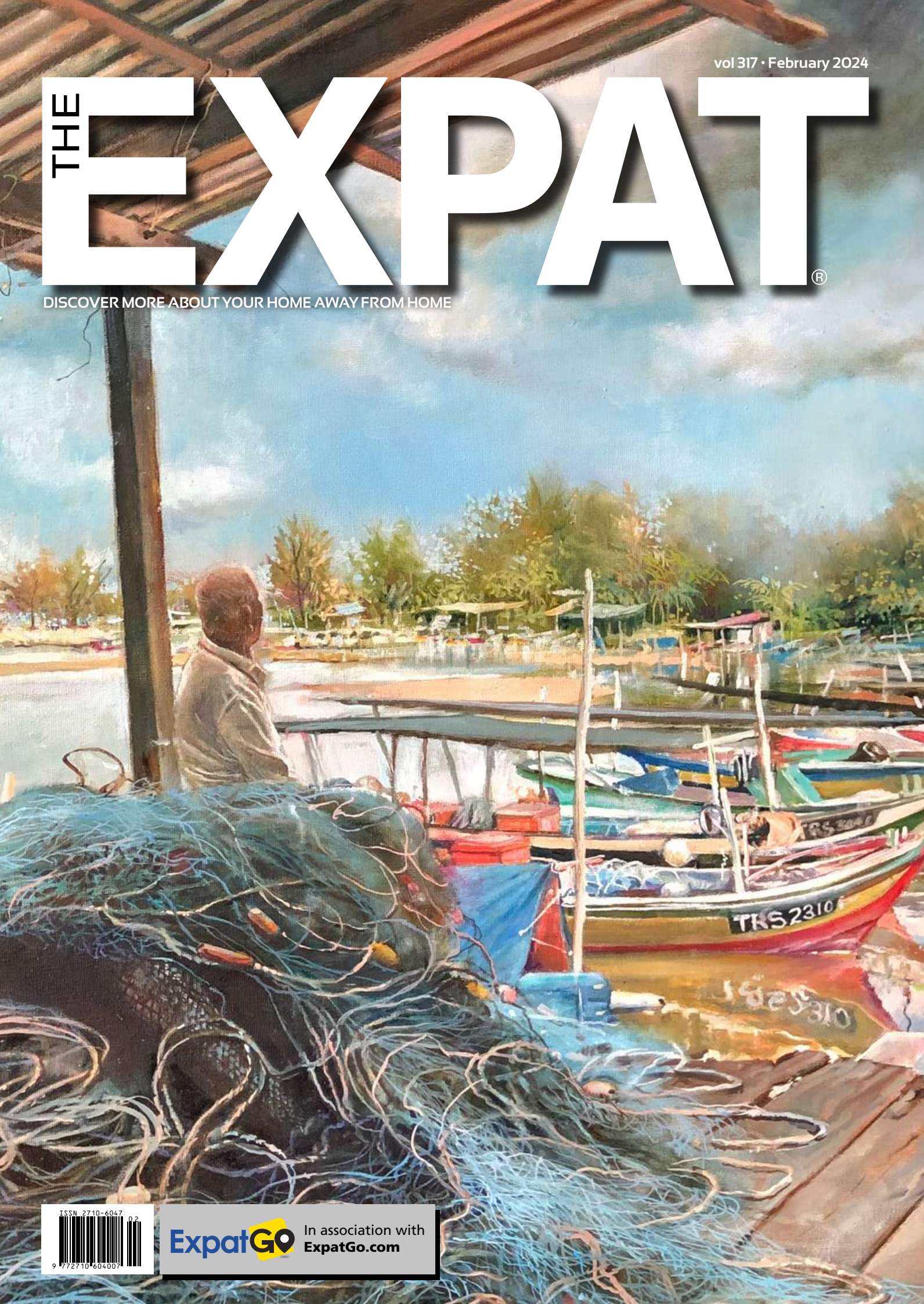


vol 317 • February 2024

# THE EXPAT

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# Hi There!

[facebook.com/ExpatGoMalaysia](https://facebook.com/ExpatGoMalaysia)

I have written more than 300 of these 'Hi There' columns since I launched *The Expat* magazine in 1996. Most of the topics I write about are local happenings and my take on them, but sometimes I include stories about my family or myself.

My wife encouraged me to humanize them with personal insights, but I have never been entirely comfortable doing so. I know some people prefer the comments to be limited to local affairs, but others have told me they appreciate the occasional personalisation.

At the beginning of January, my middle son, Spencer, died suddenly. He died peacefully in his sleep, and there are still some questions about the cause of his unexpected death. I have met and read about people who have lost their children, but that doesn't prepare you for the flood of emotions that such an event brings. As parents, we naturally believe we should die before our offspring which makes the experience that much harder.

Having spent much of the past few weeks witnessing the death and destruction taking place in Gaza and feeling increasingly distressed by the scenes on the television, I was already feeling quite upset. However, not surprisingly, the death of my son was heavier and much more personal.

We had not spent a lot of time together in recent years. When his mother and I divorced, she moved back to the States, and my contact with my two sons was limited, despite my buying a house in Florida to give us a place to meet. One eventually relocated here, but Spencer stayed in the States. There is no doubt his death affects his brother and mother more profoundly, but it also hit me harder than I would have imagined.

Because of some prior problems with tracking my alimony payments, I am *persona non grata* in the US, so have had to stop visiting, which meant I could not attend the funeral service – not that I would have been all that welcome there.

Spencer made a surprise appearance when I had brain surgery in Singapore in 2022, which I very much appreciated because it was a long trip for him to make. I am very grateful for that time with him and it seemed to be the beginning of a closer relationship, which I welcomed.

After his passing, I experienced a lot of thoughts that began with "if only..." but I know one has to put those thoughts aside. At least he died peacefully and after an enjoyable New Year's holiday in Mexico with his longtime girlfriend.

Given my advancing years, I have been exposed to the passing of quite a few friends, but the emotions are far stronger when the death is your child and still young – Spencer was only in his 30s. For all those of you who have suffered similar losses, you have my deepest sympathies. I know I am closer to understanding your suffering now that I have been through the experience myself.

Writing about this tragic occurrence (for me) may be a little self-indulgent, but it was something I wished to do, as few things are more universally shared by people than death.

Make the most of your life, wherever you are and at whatever age, as you never know what is lurking around the corner.

Andy

J. Andrew Davison





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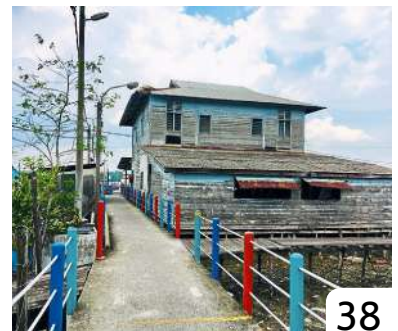
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For further information, contact Lini at 03.2094 9664 or email [linidavison@tegmedia.my](mailto:linidavison@tegmedia.my)



COVER:  
SIRI PAKA  
STORY ON PAGE 52

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# Upcoming Events

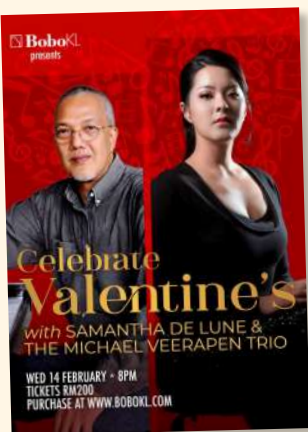
**TINY METROPOLIS**  
A DIORAMA OF KUALA LUMPUR  
9TH JANUARY - 29TH FEBRUARY 2024



## 1 - 29 Feb Tiny Metropolis

An enchanting exhibit running all month at Central Market Kuala Lumpur, Tiny Metropolis showcases meticulously crafted miniature replicas of KL's most iconic and beloved

buildings. Not only do these buildings define the skyline of the Malaysian capital, they also weave a tapestry of the city's past and present, a blending of historical significance and modern dynamism. Explore and be in awe of the Tiny Metropolis, celebrating the rich heritage and architectural marvels that define Kuala Lumpur. Visit [centralmarket.com.my](http://centralmarket.com.my) for more details.



## 14 Feb

**Celebrate Valentine's**  
This Valentine's Day, be soothed and mesmerized by the cool vocal stylings of Samantha de Lune and the Michael Veerapen Trio at BoboKL in Bangsar. Enjoy a

line-up of smooth, romantic favourites that delivers a Valentine's Day to remember. The show starts at 8pm and tickets are for sale on [bobokl.com](http://bobokl.com).

## 24 Feb Fantasia Across Dreams: Mozart & Tchaikovsky

Brought to you by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, settle in and delight in the wondrous melodies of Vaughan Williams' 'Fantasia on a Theme' by Thomas Tallis. Inspired by the 16th-century English composer, the work's unique call for a string quartet and a double string orchestra weaves an antiphonal web, immersing the listener in a rich luminous sound. Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1 is full of playful melodies and lively dialogues between the horn and the orchestra, whilst Principal Horn

Grzegorz Curyła returns with Mozart's Horn Concerto No. 3. Tickets start at RM198 and can be purchased at [mpo.com.my](http://mpo.com.my).

## 21 - 23 Feb Emotional Intelligence Workshop for Managers

Be a better boss with this masterclass for in-depth emotional intelligence at the workplace. This training course, organised by Singapore's Opus Kinetic Pte Ltd, aims to enhance emotional intelligence in personal and organisational contexts, leading to improved individual and team performance. It involves perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions for effective outcomes. Participants can assess their emotional intelligence quotient and develop skills to leverage it. Visit [10times.com](http://10times.com) for more information.



## 24 Feb Back to the Blues

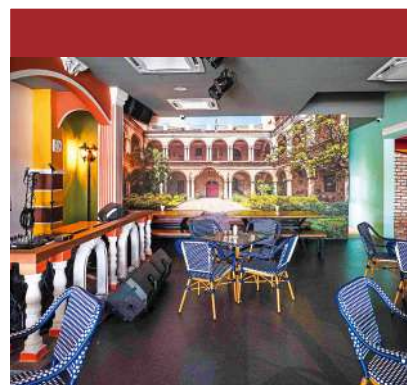
Back to the Blues is an amazing urban art and music festival that combines large-scale art with compelling, enjoyable musical performances. The central theme is the blues, its roots, and its influence in shaping modern music. The stage is set to host some of the most influential blues artists, both locally and regionally. The event, which runs from 12pm to 11pm, will be held at the Bandar Malaysia Event Space, a fascinating site that was once an old air force base, but has now been converted into an open-air event space - complete with still-parked old fighter jets! Entry tickets start at just RM88. For more info and tickets, visit [senisana.org/back-to-the-blues](http://senisana.org/back-to-the-blues). You can also check out [facebook.com/Backtotheblueskl](http://facebook.com/Backtotheblueskl) and even get a preview sample on Spotify - just look for the 'Back to the Blues 2024' playlist!

## 24 Feb Ed Sheeran's World Tour Arrives in KL

Acclaimed hitmaker Ed Sheeran is



bringing his + - = ÷ × world tour (called 'The Mathematics Tour') to Asia and will be performing at Bukit Jalil National Stadium for one night only, with special guest popular singer-songwriter Calum Scott. The Asia tour follows Sheeran's record-breaking USA tour, which set multiple attendance records including in Los Angeles and at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium, with the latter tallying the largest single-day concert attendance - 89,106 - in its history. Ticket prices range from RM198 to RM1,388 and are on sale at [golive-asia.com](http://golive-asia.com). For more information on the concert, visit [edsheeranKL2024.my](http://edsheeranKL2024.my).



## 22 Feb TEG Mingle at Bangsar's CuBar

It's a night of Cuban beats and eats! Held at the fun and funky CuBar in Bangsar's ever-popular Telawi district, the February TEG Mingle is set to be an especially enjoyable one as salsa dancers will be on hand to not only demonstrate this engaging dance form, but to get Minglers in on the fun, as well. Enjoy curated light bites, and a selection of wines or free-flow beers as you mix and mingle the night away! For all the details, just visit [expatgo.com](http://expatgo.com) or drop an email to [anne@tegmedia.my](mailto:anne@tegmedia.my).



# expat associations

TEG Media encourages readers to consider joining and supporting one of the various associations noted below, any of which would welcome new members. These groups focus more on the social aspects of your stay, and many are involved with helping local charities. If you know of more expat associations or clubs which should be listed here, please drop a line to [editor@tegmedia.my](mailto:editor@tegmedia.my).

## GREATER KUALA LUMPUR .....

### **MALAYSIAN AUSTRALIAN NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION (MANZA)**

Open to all nationalities, and with their own clubhouse in Bangsar this association is well-known to many expats.

[manza.org](http://manza.org) and [facebook.com/MalaysianAustralianNewZealandAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/MalaysianAustralianNewZealandAssociation)

### **ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH WOMEN IN MALAYSIA (ABWM)**

Founded in 1975, the ABWM is quite active and supports many charities. They also have a clubhouse in Bangsar.

[abwm.com.my](http://abwm.com.my) and [facebook.com/associationofbritishwomeninmalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/associationofbritishwomeninmalaysia)

### **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA (AAM)**

Founded in 1961, and with a suite in Avenue K shopping mall in central KL, the AAM is well-established and active.

[americanassociationofmy.com](http://americanassociationofmy.com) and [facebook.com/AmericanAssociationMY](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanAssociationMY)

### **DUTCH ASSOCIATION IN MALAYSIA (NLV)**

Aiming to connect Dutch people in Malaysia, the NLV is very active throughout the year. They organise activities for adults as well as kids.

Visit [nlvmaleisie.org](http://nlvmaleisie.org).

### **LATIN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA**

Encompassing and integrating the Latin community in Malaysia, this is a very active association with lots of fun activities.

[latinwam.org](http://latinwam.org) and [facebook.com/latinwam.org](https://www.facebook.com/latinwam.org)

### **ST PATRICKS SOCIETY OF SELANGOR**

Founded in 1925, this is one of the oldest such groups in Malaysia, and is famed for its annual St Patrick's Ball.

[stpatroc.org](http://stpatroc.org) and [facebook.com/groups/stpatroc](https://www.facebook.com/groups/stpatroc)

### **SCANDINAVIAN SOCIETY OF MALAYSIA (SSM)**

The SSM aims to bring together people from/or related to Scandinavia, and was founded in 1965.

[facebook.com/ScandinavianSocietyMalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/ScandinavianSocietyMalaysia)

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION KL (IWAKL)**

Founded in 1989, this non-profit group is open to women of all nationalities.

[iwakl.org](http://iwakl.org)

### **GERMAN SPEAKING SOCIETY OF MALAYSIA KL (GSSKL)**

With an aim of giving interested people in Malaysia an insight into German, Austrian, and Swiss culture, the GSSKL is also noted for The KL Post, its German-language magazine.

[gsskl.com.my](http://gsskl.com.my) and [facebook.com/GermanSpeakingSocietyKualaLumpur](https://www.facebook.com/GermanSpeakingSocietyKualaLumpur)

### **ST DAVID'S SOCIETY MALAYSIA**

A home away from home for the Welsh in Kuala Lumpur, this society was founded in 1963.

[facebook.com/StDavidsSocietyMalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/StDavidsSocietyMalaysia)

## PENANG .....

### **MALAYSIAN-GERMAN SOCIETY (MGS)**

One of the larger expat associations, the MGS has a sizeable home in Penang, and they're famous for hosting their annual Oktoberfest event.

[mgs.org.my](http://mgs.org.my) and [facebook.com/MalaysianGermanSocietyPenang](https://www.facebook.com/MalaysianGermanSocietyPenang)

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (PENANG)**

This well-established group is known for offering various activities and workshops for Penang-based women, and has an aim of supporting its members and their families, as well as helping the community.

[iwapenang.com](http://iwapenang.com) and [facebook.com/IWAPenang](https://www.facebook.com/IWAPenang)

## JOHOR .....

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (JOHOR)**

Established in 1999, the JB chapter of the IWA is one the best-known organisations for Johor-based expats.

[iwa-johorbahru.org](http://iwa-johorbahru.org) and [facebook.com/JBInternationalWomensAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/JBInternationalWomensAssociation)



## JOHOR SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

In mid-January this year, The Singapore and Malaysian government confirmed their commitment to create a special economic zone in Johor which will become a place where Singapore businesses can expand or relocate. The decision to set up this zone could be a win-win for both countries as rising costs are driving many companies away from Singapore and Johor has plenty of space and very low operating costs.

They will examine ways of expediting the transfer of goods and people between the two countries and are talking about passport-free travel which would expedite the border crossing. That would surely be welcome, as the border is severely congested during peak hours and even worse on public holidays.

It is not yet clear on what terms companies will be able to operate. In the past, Malaysia has missed out on opportunities because they were unwilling to issue the required visas required by businesses for expats wanting to live and work here. Even recently, expats have told us they experienced difficulties getting work permits for themselves or their staff, and of course the changes to MM2H in 2021 were widely seen as an attempt to decrease the number of foreigners living here.

The border crossing, which is one of the busiest in the world, is a major negative for people who have to frequently cross it. Many Malaysians travel to Singapore each day because of the higher salaries paid in that country, but the long commute made some give up despite the considerable increase in pay. Given the fact that the overwhelming number of people who cross are doing it legitimately and without any intention of smuggling goods or otherwise breaking the law, this seems to provide a potentially excellent opportunity and should motivate those in

power to find ways to significantly accelerate the process.

We believe this initiative is definitely a good one. We know of many people who would like to live in Johor and work in Singapore, but there is no suitable visa, and of course, the border crossing can be something of a nightmare. We will observe progress with interest.



## MM2H STILL PENDING

The new rules for MM2H were announced but apparently, they had not yet been approved by the Cabinet, so the release may have been premature. Also, as many noted, several important details were missing from the announcement, such as the new minimum income requirement. When the required monthly income was increased from RM10,000 to RM40,000, there was a massive fall-off in applications and Malaysia lost its position as one of the world's best places to retire.

There was also no mention of the need to show liquid assets at the time of applying for the visa. The requirement under the most recent MM2H terms was RM1,500,000, although it was never clear how this figure was arrived at, since the required Fixed Deposit on approval was lower at RM1,000,000.

It was also unclear whether existing MM2H participants would have to meet the new requirements at some point in the future or whether the new programme would continue to allow them to renew their visas on previous terms.

We assume the documentation requirements will be the same, but there

has been no confirmation of this. This information is important simply because if it is not exactly right, the submission will be rejected.

Finally, there is considerable scepticism about the granting of permanent residency under the highest tier, Platinum. This tier requires a fixed deposit of RM5 million and some people are already expressing concerns about offering PR so freely. Normally, it takes several years for anyone living here who meets the required criteria to receive it. It is not clear how long an applicant under this category would have to wait to receive it and no doubt the documentation requirements will probably be more demanding than for the other categories of visa. To our minds, there is also a big question mark on whether the Cabinet would approve handing out PR visas in this manner.

## HIGH-SPEED RAIL: KL TO SINGAPORE

The high-speed rail project between Malaysia and Singapore has been a go/no-go project for several years. In 2013, both the Malaysian and Singaporean







governments signed off on the project, and it was agreed they would proceed. However, there was not much evidence of progress being made and in 2018, the new government announced they would scrap the project as it was too expensive. Subsequently, the government announced it was suspended and not cancelled. Now, the current government seems to be in favour of resuscitating the project and has announced they will proceed with it.

The government has set up a company, MyHSR Corporation, to run the project and they issued a Request for Information for private companies to submit proposals. In mid-January, seven consortiums submitted concept proposals with their ideas for the project.

The train service would run from somewhere in Kuala Lumpur area to Singapore, a distance of around 350 kilometers. The trains are expected to cover the distance in around 90 minutes which would shorten the total travel time for most people.



Some parties have suggested that a high-speed train from KL to Bangkok would actually make more economic sense, but it remains to be seen if this idea will gain any real traction.

#### **NAJIB WANTS 'MAN ON THE RUN' TAKEN OFF AIR**

The Netflix series *Man on the Run*, which covers the 1MDB case involving massive financial losses, has proved to be very popular. It mainly focuses on Jho Low, the alleged mastermind of the fraud, which resulted in billions of dollars being stolen from Malaysia and much of it ending up in his accounts. His jet-setting life was frequently covered in various media as he liked to be surrounded by famous people who were often paid handsomely to attend his parties.

Former US Attorney General Jeff Sessions referred to the theft, which amounted to billions of ringgit stolen from the Malaysian people, as 'kleptocracy at its worst.'

Former Prime Minister Najib is now serving 12 years in prison for his role in the scandal and is still facing more charges. Jho Low has disappeared, and despite red notices with Interpol, cannot be found, although it is speculated that he is hiding somewhere in China.

Najib's lawyer has requested the government to instruct Netflix to take down the series in Malaysia because it could prejudice his current court case. They seem to be taking a while to consider this request. Meanwhile, the show is getting plenty of views.

#### **PARDON FOR NAJIB**

There has been plenty of news coverage about the possibility of a possible royal pardon for former Prime Minister Najib, with many people speculating he will be free before the next election as he remains very popular with the Malay voters whose support the current

government is struggling to secure. Legal experts, however, say a pardon in the near future is very unlikely because he is less than two years into his prison term and still faces more charges.

Najib was the president of UMNO, the party which ruled Malaysia for many years, and during the time he was Prime Minister his deputy was Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is once again Deputy Prime Minister in the current government having led his party to join the ruling coalition. Zahid faced 47 criminal charges himself, but recently had them effectively dismissed by the high court as a 'discharge not amounting to an acquittal,' sparking considerable criticism and public backlash.

#### **FORMER FINANCE MINISTER BEING INVESTIGATED**

Tun Daim Zainuddin, who was Finance Minister from 1984 to 1991, is one of the most recent high-profile figures to be investigated by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). They recently seized a 60-storey building, Ilham Tower, in central KL belonging to his family. According to reports, the seizure was related to a case involving the embezzlement of government funds totalling over RM2.3 billion.

For his part, Daim claims his wealth (he is reported to be a billionaire) was the result of the money he made as a businessman before he joined the government. He mostly lives overseas, but he was appointed to head the Council of Eminent Persons, which Tun Mahathir set up to act as advisors when he became Prime Minister again in 2018.

MACC authorities have stressed that day-to-day business in the 274-m skyscraper will continue as normal, and that the seizure notice will not have any effect on the various businesses operating in the tower. ■





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TEG Media's Group Editor **Chad Merchant** chose to move from the United States to Malaysia in 2008 to experience living in a different country. Now, 15 years later, he certainly recognises those differences, yet feels, in some ways, almost home. Feel free to drop a line to [chad@tegmedia.my](mailto:chad@tegmedia.my).



# How Are You – Really?

It's almost a throwaway question most of the time, nothing more than a social nicety, "How are you?" Ask the question and you'll get one of a standard selection of answers, ranging from "Great" or "Not bad" to "Hanging in there!" or even the insipid "I'm fine."

If you amend the question ever so slightly to "How are you doing?" or "How have you been?" you may get a more complete response, but in most cases, it will still be fairly perfunctory and superficial. But the addition of just one key word, however, can shift the entire conversation.

"How are you – *really*?"

This one word is a game-changer, indicating a desire to step outside the meaningless chit-chat and small talk, and get a more genuine, nuanced response.

In the aftermath of a long and difficult pandemic, an unprecedented global event for nearly everyone who lived through it – or didn't – mental health experts have suggested that there is a subtle but widespread social malaise, a lingering bit of anxiety, a sense of loss, and even depression.

On one level – the "How are you?" level – it kind of seems everything is right back to normal. But scratch the surface. Get to the "How are you – *really*?" level, though, and you'll find something a little different. A little off. Economists and businessfolk talk of hoping that 2024 brings a return to 2019 levels of this or that, but their talk is only of jobs and revenues and quarterly earnings. It's all important, of course, but the conversation about societies returning to 2019 levels of psychological wellbeing is one that's happening, too, albeit a little more quietly.

A return to normalcy was something we all longed for during the days of lockdowns, forced isolation, mask-wearing, and other restrictions. Then, almost suddenly, normality returned. And yet... not quite.

In talking to numerous people, they have told me they've battled with bouts of low-key depression, a fear of large crowds, unfamiliar anxieties, new and different forms of job stress, and fractured relationships as a result of the pandemic. Some told me that whereas they used to be outgoing and adventurous, they now felt they were more introverted and timid. Two of my friends had been in years-long relationships, both couples cruising along towards marriage. But neither of these couples' relationships survived the pandemic intact. Obviously, many people lost loved ones to the virus, lending an even deeper trauma to the Covid years.

Though not everyone I spoke with could quite articulate it, what became apparent to me was a shared sense of loss and unresolved grief. We didn't all just experience a traumatic event, we all lost a lot because of it. Children, in particular, effectively lost a significant chunk of their young lives. Years went by without normal socialisation and learning. That time can never be reclaimed, and though it hits differently, it's just as true for adults. We lost somewhere between two and three years of our finite (and rapidly passing) lives. We lost the sense of what was normal. We lost social connections. We lost relationships. Some of us permanently lost friends and family. Like any loss, this all must be grieved over and somehow processed. And there's plenty to suggest – both anecdotally and through formal studies – that we're not doing it.

As for me, I have never been particularly good at expressing my feelings. Even writing this column has been a challenge. Perhaps like many people (certainly men), there's a sense that things like sadness and grief are signs of weakness. Of course I know that's not true, but some ingrained notions are hard to overcome.

Just as the pandemic was about to really ramp up, my mother died in the US,

having spent several years battling Parkinson's Disease. She raised me largely on her own, so of course we were rather close. I had, fortunately, visited her just six or seven weeks earlier, and our last conversation was a good one. Shortly after her passing, the world effectively shut down. In her typical selfless way, she had made arrangements for her body to be donated to science upon her death, in the hopes that such an act could further the research efforts into the causes of and possible treatments for Parkinson's. That precluded the need for a proper funeral, but because of the burgeoning pandemic, I wasn't able to go back for even a modest service. Lurching into the pandemic and its lockdowns so soon after my mother's death, one traumatic episode was effectively replaced by another. Did I ever even properly grieve? I'm not sure.

More recently, at the end of 2023, I looked back on the previous few months and realised with some dismay that it had been really quite a bad period. Taken bit by bit, it was all manageable, but in the aggregate, I was struck at how rough a time it had, in retrospect, clearly been. When I made the effort to share this with friends and even colleagues, the reaction was not what I expected. There was instant understanding and commiseration. To a person, *everyone* to whom I opened up about these difficulties responded in kind; they, too, were struggling.

So how are you – *really*? Are you looking after yourself and focusing on your wellbeing? For me, I've decided to prioritise not only my physical health in 2024 (yes, still trying to shed those extra 'pandemic kilos'), but also my mental health. The first step was to realise and admit that the last few years have been a strain. I feel I've managed it well enough, but the truth is, a toll has been taken. If that's the case for you, join me in making 2024 a year to return to normal – in a more holistic way. ■



Peter Brunoehler recently launched his latest book, *Career Fulfilment and Achievement in Southeast Asia: Maximising Success at 4 Key Milestones*. Pulled largely from his own lengthy and successful expat career, this is an experience-driven, anecdote-heavy, full-career-spectrum read. Not a book of theoretical advice, his guidance and suggestions are based on almost 40 years of professional satisfaction and accomplishment, including a lot of trial and a few errors along the way. *The Expat* is publishing monthly excerpts.



# More Questions Around Career Remorse: Chapter 2, Part 2



Last month, we discussed the first four of a series of key questions to ask yourself to best ensure that career remorse isn't something that happens to you. To know where your future should be spent, and to avoid career remorse, we continue with the final four questions in your career remorse self-evaluation:

## 5. Thinking back now, have you let your 'younger self' down?

- What did you want to be when you were 10 years old? Are you doing roughly that, career-wise, right now?

- As a teenager, what did you tell Mum and Dad you wanted to do when you grew up? Are you doing it now?
- What was your university major, and why? Are you using it now?
- What did you plan to do when you finished school? Are you doing it right now?
- If not, how close are you to doing it? 75%? 50%? 25%? 10% Not at all?

You are the only one who can make this happen!

Think way back: Kids are dreamers –

idealistic, excited about the future, sensing unlimited opportunities. You need to stay that way! Are you still dreaming, or already living a career nightmare? Remember, you can still change; don't let your 10-year-old self down.

(Just to be clear and add a dose of reality: At least for most of us, I am not talking about scoring the winning goal in the World Cup or becoming an Olympic gold medallist, as many kids might dream. I am talking about more realistic hobbies and passions that can realistically lead to related careers!)

## 6. Have you let the money and perks drive your decisions?

Yes, of course money can be good. I like it, too. It buys cool stuff, great travel experiences, nice houses, etc.

And perks like the big corner offices, company cars and drivers, expat packages that I have been so fortunate to enjoy – all were really nice and allowed my family and me to live a comfortable life. But, unbeknownst to most other, there were many times when I sat in that big corner office, very introspectively... and was absolutely bored to death at my desk. Bored with my work. Bored with my industry. Bored with my career.

Don't misunderstand, I worked very hard – probably too hard in retrospect, at 60 to 90 hours a week – always trying to drive results and improve the organisations where I worked, so it absolutely wasn't a lack of effort. It was a lack of feeling strongly about what I was doing, to live and breathe it 24/7... and thus it was a job versus a passion. The former is limited; the latter, limitless!

You've seen them: often entrepreneurs, but also ordinary employees, who never shut up about what they do. They don't talk about the money or the perks, they enthusiastically describe the satisfaction they derive from the work they do and the industries they do that work in. Don't you envy them?

## 7. Has your "boss ego" further blinded your career satisfaction?

"Hey Boss/Hello Boss/Good Morning Boss" are greetings that all have a nice ring to them when directed toward you. It feels good to be the boss. In Southeast Asia, employees tend to really look up to, respect, and sometimes even openly admire and praise the boss.

It's also very satisfying to stroll into a large company function knowing you are leading it, seeing your name and photo on the corporate website and senior management listing, having others ask your advice as you are the formal recognised leader, and being introduced to key customers as "the big boss."



We all have egos. In fact, we need them to a large degree to amount to anything professionally. But this is another aspect of the "far from ideal career" death trap that you can get stuck in. Money, perks, and now a "big boss" type of title are rocket fuel for ego fulfilment. Again, Mum can brag to her friends, you're living the dream (theoretically), and externally it all looks great. But I can most certainly tell you it's not nearly enough... inside. You're still "running on empty" there, despite all the outward appearances of success and experience as the boss.

## 8. Do you proudly proclaim your career and industry to your in-flight seatmate?

Do you like chemicals? Do chemicals excite you? Make your heart beat or blood flow faster? (No, not those kinds of chemicals!)

Do you like people to talk to you when you fly? While some seatmates seem compelled to chat all the way across the Atlantic or Pacific or wherever you're headed, many of us prefer largely "chat-free travel" for the comfort, quiet, and privacy it provides.

However, tying the questions above together, one of my ex-bosses (a terrific guy in all respects) spent his whole career in the chemical business. He couldn't go more than five minutes without telling his seatmate about his company and industry. But he was so genuinely excited, so sincere, so passionate, that it typically began a compelling conversation that often lasted through the flight. In fact, he did a lot of recruiting this way – very successfully, in fact – as his passion clearly came through. Do you do this?

## Bonus Question: Do you want to avoid career remorse before it's too late?

I suspect that you are now feeling one of the following:

- I am still a student and/or in my first job. My career and life will be great, passionate, lucrative, and satisfying when I follow this wonderful advice!
- I am really glad I read through this chapter. I am slightly off track now, but am going to reorient myself to where my passion exists ASAP. My search starts today!
- Why didn't I read this when I was starting out? I am deeply down the wrong path, and it's too late to course correct now. Life is not fair!
- I am making good money, I like my perks and title, and I wish I had not wasted my time reading this nonsense!
- Wait, what. I have a choice of what I want to do in my career? Dad said I had to be an engineer! (As more than one set of parents have been known to do – map out their kids' futures for them; all the more reason to discover your passion early on!)

Next month, we'll help steer your course, now that you're armed with your career remorse self-evaluation. ■

*Pete is a former multinational corporation executive, management consultant, and executive coach; now a regular contributor to The Expat and living in Penang with his wife. The book, Career Fulfilment and Achievement in Southeast Asia: Maximising Success at 4 Key Milestones, is available at [amazon.com/dp/BOCNYPQ89B](https://amazon.com/dp/BOCNYPQ89B).*



# Langkawi Wraps Up a Spectacular 20th Edition of Its International Regatta



**A** week-long highlight every year on the Southeast Asian sailing calendar, the 20th Royal Langkawi International Regatta (RLIR) unfolded last month in Langkawi from January 15th to 20th, 2024, marking a significant milestone in the event's history. The stakes were high for this year's 20th anniversary, but the RLIR was equal to the task, and with the help of the weather and wind gods, served up one of the best weeks of yacht racing the island has seen in recent years.

The highly anticipated regatta at the Royal Langkawi Yacht Club featured 32 boats registered in 12 countries and a whopping 240 participants, drawing sailing enthusiasts from 23 countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, the USA, Japan, Hong Kong,

New Zealand, China, and Vietnam, among others.

Malaysia's home-grown local sailors were joined by scores of resident expats and international visitors, all playing a part in this popular regatta which kicks off the region's sailing calendar each year.

Spanning six classes - Racing, IRC1, IRC2, Multihull, Sports Boats, and Club Class - the RLIR awarded a number of prestigious trophies, including the Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy, LADA-IRC Challenge Trophy, and more. Noteworthy as usual, the Tunku Abdullah Sportsmanship Award is a highly coveted honour, celebrating excellence in sportsmanship on both water and land.

The CEO of the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), Yang Berbahagia Dato'





Haslina binti Abdul Hamid, flagged off the first day's race on the start boat at 9.39am on January 15. For the 18th time at the RLIR, Simon James was tasked with running the show as the regatta's Principal Race Officer.

**FULL LIST OF WINNERS**

The Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy went to 'Witchcraft,' skippered by Nick Burns in the Racing class, who won all 10 races.

The LADA-IRC Challenge Trophy was earned by 'Mata Hari,' helmed by Vincent Chan in the IRC 1 class. In a very closely contested class, 'Mata Hari' finished just one point ahead of the runner-up 'Char Chan.'

The PSC-IRC 2 Challenge Trophy went to Jeremy Camps' 'The Blue Angel' in the IRC 2 class who won 8 out of 9 races and was well ahead of his next rival 'Piccolo.'

The Langkawi Sports Challenge Trophy was won by the 'RSYC Racing Team' in the Sports Boats class. Skipper Rizal Mahadi Sazili won 7 out of 10 races.

The Malaysia Multihull Challenge Trophy was well-earned by 'Twin Sharks,' skippered by John Newnham. The new generation racing catamaran 'Parabellum' was a fierce challenger in the Multihull class and finished only two points behind.

And finally, the RLYC Commodore's Challenge Trophy went to 'Marikh,' helmed by Wan Fadli Wan Ahmad, who scored equally with second place

'Kimikimi' in the Club class. Vincent Chan's 'Mata Hari' crew was a popular-vote winner of the Tunku Abdullah Sportsmanship Award.

Ahead of the prize-giving ceremony and gala dinner on January 20, the RLIR expressed its gratitude to co-partner Belt and Road Regatta (BRR) and sponsors, including Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), Kedah State Government, and others. Special thanks were also extended to media partners from Malaysia and around the region for helping to make this year's edition a big success. ■

*To learn more, visit [langkawiregatta.com](http://langkawiregatta.com).*







## Interested in the Malaysia My Second Home visa?

Changes are coming.  
Stay up to date with the  
Monthly MM2H e-newsletter.

Sign up now at  
[www.MM2H.com](http://www.MM2H.com)

Just RM125 per year

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# Inter-association Breakfast at Domity's Bangsar

AS PART OF THE EVOLVING PLANS for *The Expat*, we at TEG Media are in the process of reaching out to the various expat associations in Malaysia. We'd like to create a platform where they can voice themselves, communicate with the other associations, and expand their exposure – not just within their own communities, but also in a wider field.

In our most recent quest to reach out to the international associations in Malaysia, we were happy to meet with many excited responses. Many (if not all) organisations are looking forward to find a common ground to connect, mingle and exchange ideas.

To kick off the first gathering, TEG Media organised a breakfast at the beautiful restaurant space at Domity's Bangsar on Friday, January 12, where the main players of the associations were invited. We had the pleasure to meet with them, and it was wonderful to see some familiar faces, as well. Let's hope for more breakfasts to come! ■



*If you'd like to keep updated on this initiative with Malaysia's expat associations and other TEG Media events, please have a look at our Instagram page. It's easy – just scan the QR code on this page!*



TEGMEDIAEVENTS



# Happy New Year from the Dutch Association in Malaysia (NLV)



**W**ishing people a 'Happy New Year' after the first week of January... is that still ok? Or is it like keeping your Christmas tree up until February?

By the second week of January, people are too busy visiting their favourite *mamak* shops again – bye, bye resolutions. They surely can't be bothered anymore by your new year's wishes!

Oh well. The Dutch seem to have a different opinion. On Sunday, January 14, The Dutch Association in Malaysia (NLV) threw a party to celebrate the start of the new year at the Sofitel Hotel Kuala Lumpur Damansara in Damansara Heights. About 60 people gathered in the late afternoon for drinks and bites from Nizza, the hotel's chic poolside restaurant.

In his welcome speech, Mr Jan Willem Middelburg, chairman of the NLV, looked back at last year's events, but also mentioned him leaving the board to fill another chairman's position, that of the biggest hockey tournament (ZOAT) in Southeast Asia, to be held in KL this year. He expressed the hope that the association would continue to organise fabulous events, like they always had and thanked the sponsors of the NLV for their support.

Would you like to get in touch with the Dutch? Have a look here at their website: [nlvmalesie.org](http://nlvmalesie.org). You can also grab your phone and scan the QR code below of their Instagram page for more information.



TEG Media is planning to highlight more events of the international associations in Malaysia, so please keep an eye on this page. *Gelukkig nieuwjaar!* ■

# IWAKL's 35th Anniversary and Charity Dinner



**IWAKL**  
*35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

**Let's Celebrate an Evening of**

*Kaleidoscope of Cultures!*

**FRIDAY ★ 8th MARCH ★ 2024**  
**7PM - 11PM**

**Ruyi & Lyn**  
4th Floor, Annex  
Bangsar Shopping Centre

**Dresscode:**  
**\*Ladies: Elegant / Traditional \*Men: Batek / Suit / Traditional**

**Ticket @ RM320 per person**  
**Bookings / RSVP / Sales of Tables**

Anjali - +60122838341  
Email - [anjali@mezbahn.com](mailto:anjali@mezbahn.com)

Proceeds Benefit Women's Aid Organisation  
Persatuan Wanita Antarabangsa Kuala Lumpur  
International Women's Association Kuala Lumpur

Sharing. Understanding. Cooperation. Peace. Friendship. Respect. Unity.

**T**he International Women's Association of Kuala Lumpur (IWAKL) is thrilled to announce their upcoming 35th anniversary event on March 8, coinciding with International Women's Day. In celebration, IWAKL encourages attendees to dress in either their traditional attire or formal wear, as the festivities are taken to a global level. As part of this significant milestone, IWAKL is proud to support the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) in their important advocacy for women's rights and efforts to combat violence. All are invited to unite, enjoy the occasion, and contribute to making a positive impact.

RM280 Members/Spouses

RM320 Non-Members

**For more details and to RSVP:**

Anjali @ [anjali@mezbahn.com](mailto:anjali@mezbahn.com)

T: 012.283 8341

Pallavi @ [pallavigururani1988@gmail.com](mailto:pallavigururani1988@gmail.com)

T: 013.968 3783

Bedoura @ [afraz07@yahoo.com](mailto:afraz07@yahoo.com)

T: 016.416 4344

## IWAKL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

**Facebook:** International Woman Association

Kuala Lumpur IWAKL

**Instagram:** [iwa.kl](https://www.instagram.com/iwa.kl)

**Website:** [iwakl.org](http://iwakl.org)

**Email:** [info.iwakul@gmail.com](mailto:info.iwakul@gmail.com)



# Malaysia's Got Talent... and This Expat Helps Develop It!



Carl Graham

**A**s the founder and current CXO (Chief Experience Officer) of Bookd! – an international company with a Malaysian home base – Carl Graham is a force to be reckoned with.

Hailing from England, Carl shifted his career from ventilation engineering to international modelling, bringing him to Malaysia in 2010. Having been involved in the Malaysian talent industry since then, he boasts a running total now of 20 years of global experience as a model and talent, working in over 12 countries for brands like Diesel, Levis, Nescafé, and Louis Vuitton. Over time, he diversified his career into various fields, combining skills in photography, videography, public speaking, runway modelling, and as an influencer... taking him from modelling for numerous brands to creating a global business coaching talent in Malaysia and around the world!

Enchanted by the great qualities of Malaysia, Carl decided to make the travel hub of Southeast Asia his home. Attracted to the diverse culture with its cosmopolitan vibes, he found limitless opportunities, especially in Kuala Lumpur, where he currently resides. He appreciates the friendly, genuine, and welcoming nature of the local people, making it easy for him to settle in the country.

What Carl loves most about Malaysia is the year-round warm weather, the beautiful white sandy beaches on the coasts and islands, the delicious food, and the ease of travel to beautiful locations inside the country and around the region. He further opines that Malaysia also has high standards of living and is very



affordable, even for people in lower income brackets.

However, he thinks that public transportation in the country can still be improved in terms of connectivity and efficiency. The general service providers could be more customer-friendly and accessible. Carl believes Malaysia has a lot to offer, and the tourism sector can really thrive and be competitive by improving hospitality and service and catering to the needs of both local and international guests. For instance, the beach resorts around the country could do better if they would be equipped with facilities that suit the needs of discerning expats and foreign tourists who want to make beautiful memories in Malaysia. Let's ask Carl a few more questions!

**Why did you decide to live in Malaysia?**

Malaysia has a vibrant energy with warm and friendly people. It has high living standards that are very affordable. The diverse culture fit into my lifestyle and business ideas quite well.

It was accommodating 10 years ago to set up a business and so I took that opportunity.

**What is your favourite Malaysian food?**

I was horrified when I first came to Malaysia to discover that nearly every rice dish or Asian meal is served with cut *chili padi* in soy sauce. However, over time I built up the courage to begin the spice

journey, and nowadays food without *chili padi* just isn't food anymore. *Nasi lemak* for breakfast seemed like a very strange concept then, but now it has become my favourite.

**Any favourite holiday destinations in Malaysia and why?**

I love Penang! George Town is a vibrant city, surrounded by nice beaches which are all within easy reach. It is reasonably close to Kuala Lumpur and accessible via a smooth drive (usually) on the North-South Expressway. Penang has amazing food and a great environment with lots of things to do. Other than that, I also love venturing wider into East Malaysia and to any of the islands on the East Coast of Malaysia such as the Perhentian islands, Redang, and the Rawa islands. Absolutely beautiful.

**Do you have any favourite restaurants or pubs?**

There are just so many amazing restaurants and street food places... I could not possibly choose one. As for pubs, I am not a huge pub-goer despite my very British heritage, but I do enjoy Gravy Baby. They have tasty food, a great atmosphere, and serve good pints of Guinness, too.

**What is your favourite Malaysian saying and why?**

Simple and easy, the only thing you ever need to say – *boleh!* It embodies so many aspects of Malaysian culture and I love it.

**How would you compare Malaysia and the UK in general?**

They are two completely different countries in terms of weather, social connections, cultural awareness, diversity of friends, and education. Malaysia has a vast variety of reasonably priced food, and great opportunities for exponential growth in general, and for businesses.

**What do you wish you had in Malaysia but is not available here?**

There is almost nothing you cannot find in Malaysia these days; it has got everything one could wish for. If you cannot find something, it is just probably you do not know the right person. In Malaysia, you can also practically get anything accomplished if you have the right network.

**What is your funniest experience so far in Malaysia?**

I do not know whether I would call it funny or scary, but it was certainly pretty stunning at the time when I witnessed it – and still is to this day. It seems like it is a normal practice for the drivers here, that upon realising they have taken a wrong turn on the highway or missed their exit, they will immediately slam on the brakes and get the car in reverse, going backwards towards oncoming traffic in the hope that no collision will happen. I was gobsmacked and scared when I witnessed it, but I was also impressed by the “Malaysia *boleh!*” spirit. So, okay *lah*. Go with the flow, as it is just the way it is. ■



# Furry, Feathered, and More...



**H**ello there, dear furry friend lovers! Or not-so-furry perhaps, if your pet is covered with scales, feathers, or spikes.

These days, more and more people in Malaysia are getting into the joy of having pets, and of course that includes quite a few expats, too. Hopefully, nothing never ever happens to your pet, and it will stay healthy and happy until its dying days. But what if the condition of your pet changes, and you need the help of a good vet? With so many kinds of pets in Kuala Lumpur, it's not always easy to find that one vet who speaks your paw friend's language. Here's an overview of the best vets in Klang Valley... 'vetted' and curated for you!

## **EL'S VETERINARY CENTRE**

A friend of mine has an Amazon parrot and it took some real work for him to find a proper avian vet - he ended up having to go all the way to Seri Kembangan! El's Veterinary Centre provides health care and other veterinary-related services for pets. Not only dogs and cats are welcome, but also rabbits, birds, pocket pets (like hamsters, sugar gliders, and guinea pigs), reptiles, and other exotic and wild animals. Walk-in visits Tuesday to Sunday, from 10am to 12pm and 2pm to 4.30pm. Any enquiry, please call 017.223 8827 or 03.8964 0955, or kindly email them at [elsveterinarycentre@gmail.com](mailto:elsveterinarycentre@gmail.com)

***Menara Simfoni, 19-G, Jalan Simfoni 1,  
Balakong, 43300 Seri Kembangan,  
Selangor***







#### **GASING VETERINARY HOSPITAL**

This hospital in PJ provides a wide range of services. Their vets are very experienced and trustworthy, and especially Dr Prem comes highly recommended. This hospital is quite popular, so sometimes waiting times are long. Regardless of this, Gasing hospital is still a favourite. Vets here are well-trained, they have good equipment, and their services are well-priced compared to other animal hospitals.

**53 & 55, Jln 5/58, Gasing Indah, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor**

#### **PETS HEALTH VETERINARY CLINIC**

This clinic in PJ offers a wide range in in-house facilities, as well as x-rays and ultrasounds, and they also perform surgeries. Dr Tan comes recommended and paw parents find her very caring and responsible towards their fur kids. Call 03.7880 5333 for more information or appointments.

**38-G, Jalan PJU 1/45, Aman Suria, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor**

#### **PET HAVEN**

A small clinic in Desa Sri Hartamas, run by Dr Sam and Dr Ho, who deliver service with a smile. They just love puppies, so if you ever bring one in, make sure they don't try to keep it! Pet Haven seems to be a popular choice for animal-loving families from the Hartamas and Mont Kiara vicinity. Call 012.634 2007 for appointments. More info on their website

at <https://pethavenveterinaryclinic.business.site>.

**12, Ground Floor, Jalan 22B/70A, Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur**

#### **KM GLOBAL ANIMAL HOSPITAL**

Recommended for their comprehensive services, this animal hospital near Batu Caves does everything from surgeries to boarding, organising pet taxis, and pet relocation. They also provide pet funeral services. We like them for the very reasonable rates they apply to neuter stray animals. Please call 03.6178 0826 for appointments.

**5, Jalan Industri Batu Caves 1/1, Taman Perindustrian Batu Caves, 68100 Batu Caves, Selangor**

#### **HEALING ROOMS VETERINARY CLINIC**

This place in Subang Jaya is very good, according to its satisfied patrons. As with any place that offers top services at good prices, the downside is that there's nearly always a queue. Their vet Annie comes especially highly recommended. Please call before coming in: 03.5637 6166.

**Lot 29, G Floor, Wisma Dicor, Jln SS 17/1A, SS17, Subang Jaya, Selangor**

#### **ST ANGEL ANIMAL MEDICAL CENTRE**

Dr Ding at St Angel's comes recommended, he is specialised in cancer treatment for pets. He is very thorough in his examination and gives detailed explanation and advice. This animal



centre is also known for their successful parvo treatments.

**19, Jalan Bandar Empat Belas, Pusat Bandar Puchong, 47100 Puchong, Selangor**

#### **LEOW VETERINARY CLINIC AND SURGERY**

The clinic is located in Bandar Manjalara, Kepong, and treats not only cats and dogs, but also exotic animals like bearded dragons. There are not many vets around who treat exotic animals, and this is apparently your go-to clinic if your pet is a spiky one.

**Jalan 5/62a, Bandar Manjalara, Kepong**



# Saving Malaysia's Strays



**T**here he is: an elderly dog, skinny, limping, and searching for food. When I drive along the quiet streets of our neighbourhood at night, he sometimes shows up. Protected by the darkness, he roams the streets, in search of scraps. He's a loner, which is unusual. Most of the time, stray dogs like him stay together and seek the protection of the pack.

The number of stray dogs and cats in Malaysia is overwhelming. Studies suggest that there are currently between 5 and 6 million strays. Not all of them are entirely homeless, though. There are a few private initiatives that take to the plight of street dogs and cats and provide a home and shelter for them. They can't be given enough praise, considering that looking after strays, like every normal pet, is costly and time-consuming.

**A THREE-LEGGED MONKEY AND A PIG**  
One of these unsung heroes is Mr Yong

from the MeeFa Homeless Animals Shelter in Seminyeh, Seremban. He and his wife Kim look after more than 2,000 animals. How to keep such a large number alive, and how do you feed them daily? It is a massive challenge for them, but with the help of volunteers and sponsors, they somehow manage. Per month they need 6,000 kg of rice, plus funds for salaries, the electricity bill, and costs for vets.

At the MeeFa shelter you'll find not only dogs and a few cats, but also a massive pig, a tortoise, and a three-legged monkey. "Poor thing got hit by lightning," Mr Yong says as he takes me on a tour through the shelter. While he explains about the many dogs, I try to block out the noise of the barking dogs – I give up after a while. While some dogs sit in cages, alone or together, others lie on the floor or walk around the large space of the shelter. I walk around carefully and try not to step on paws, tails, ears, or noses.





### FROM 30 DOGS TO MORE THAN 2,000

About 20 years ago, Madam Chan Mee Fah started the shelter at her home, while taking in more and more dogs from the streets around Seminyeh. Her house became too small for the 30 street dogs who were occupying it, and she built a shelter with the help and financial support of donors. Mrs Mee Fah passed away a few years ago and during the Covid years, funds dried up. The remaining volunteers were about to euthanise the dogs, but luckily the tides turned, and slowly the public came to the rescue. Nowadays, the shelter has enacted a no-kill policy.

### ADOPT, DON'T SHOP

Of course, you can always consider adopting a lifelong friend from the shelter! Contact Mr Yong via WhatsApp on 012.331 2680, or email him at [furryfuture22@gmail.com](mailto:furryfuture22@gmail.com).

Donations are more than welcome via the QR code below. You can find more info about the shelter on their Facebook page.



### MeeFah Homeless Animals shelter

1858, Kg Rincing Hulu, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor

### A SHELTER NEAR THE SEA

On the other side of Peninsular Malaysia, near Kuantan, lives another amazing dog-loving person who joins the fight for

homeless animals. Her name is Puvaneswary and she runs a shelter here called K9 Happy Home.

"You know all your dogs by name?" I ask. Puva proudly nods, "Yes, and I can also recognise them when they're barking." I find that hard to believe, yet I wouldn't be surprised if it were true. We enter the shelter, which Puva runs together with an assistant. It was built around her grandmother's house. As soon as we enter, the dogs go nuts, and speaking to each other is impossible. After about five minutes, they calm down and we can walk around. A few dogs sit together in cages, while some sit alone. The cages look spotless. "Some cannot get along with other dogs," says Puva, "but every day, they are all allowed to go out for a run."

She continued, "We often hear about dogs that are neglected somewhere and don't get food. We will then pick them up. But it also happens that people leave boxes of puppies on our doorstep. Of course, we have to take these in if we can't locate the mother. I started four years ago with 60 dogs, now K9 Happy Home has got more than 200 animals."

### BUILDING A NEW PLACE

With all the noise, the neighbours started to complain, and Puva was forced to find shelter elsewhere. With help of her family, she found a piece of land nearby and started to build a new shelter there. "It is very costly. We're lucky that we have a few sponsors, but with the costs of



feeding the dogs at the same time, it is very tough. We just started to build a kitchen area at the new place. We hope that the rain will stop soon, so we can finish it."

There are no funds and certainly no government resources, to help Puva. "It's your own initiative, so solve it yourself", was the message she heard. So that's what she does. With the help of individuals who come to her rescue every now and then. If you like, you can help Puva's dogs by donating via her bank account below.

**Puvaneswary a/p Koomaran**  
**BSN (Bank Simpanan Nasional Berhad)**  
**0600141100036656 ■**



# KKB: Selangor's Recreational Treasure



Near the town centre of Kuala Kubu Bharu

**T**he Malay word for 'new' enjoys a number of different spellings – *baru, bahru, baharu, bharu* – and if you spend enough time wandering around Malaysia, you'll see this word pop up in all its iterations in various place names. It occasionally begs the question of why it's used. For instance, if Johor Bahru is the 'new' one, was there ever an 'old' version? And in the case of the differently spelled Kota Bharu, located in Kelantan, the name translates literally to 'new city.' So did it replace a previous 'old city'? Kota Lama, perhaps? After all, there is a Cherating Lama, or 'old Cherating' – a tiny *kampung* just near the 'newer' version of the town.

While we're not sure about the history of all these places, there is one whose 'new' designation makes complete sense in the context of its history. Kuala Kubu Bharu, usually just called KKB, is a charming little town in rural Selangor state, and it's indeed a newer version of the old Kuala Kubu.

## A CIVIL WAR, A WHITE CROCODILE, AND A TROUBLED HISTORY

Sited in the Ulu Selangor area of northern Selangor, Kuala Kubu Bharu actually holds a fascinating past that unfolds over not decades, but millennia. The Neolithic Age, approximately 4,000 years ago, witnessed human settlements here, evidenced by slab stone burials in the

Bernam Valley. The subsequent Metal Age, spanning 3,000 to 2,500 years ago, left its mark with the discovery of iron artifacts and bronze celts in what is present-day Rasa and Kerling.

Much more recently, the 18th century saw the influx of Sumatran settlers, the Rawa and Mendailing, lured by the promise of



Aerial shot of KKB





Rawang Bypass

new lands and abundant tin. At this juncture, Sungai Selangor (Selangor River) emerged as a vital trade route, ferrying tin to Kuala Selangor, which was then the royal capital. Tax disputes grew as trade between neighbouring states increased. Then, the wealth of tin mines which had been discovered closer to Kuala Lumpur and the control of the considerable revenue flowing from them – along with the pursuit of greater political power – all coalesced in series of conflicts that unfolded over the next several years.

Ulu Selangor Malays became integral players in the Selangor Civil War (1867-1874), a tumultuous era that etched the town's name into history. Raja Mahadi, in defence against rivals, erected an earthen fort near a river mouth, giving birth to *Kuala Kubu*, or 'the fort at the mouth of the river.' This strategic move reflected the town's role in the factional conflicts involving Chinese groups such as Hai San, led by Yap Ah Loy, supporting Tengku Kudin, and Ghee Hin, led by Chong Chong, siding with Raja Mahadi.

Following the lengthy war, which in 1872 saw the fledgling town of Kuala Lumpur captured and subsequently razed to the ground, Raja Mahadi fled to Johor in 1874 and Tengku Kudin's faction won the war. This marked a transformative phase during the state's history, as the British Residency of Selangor was officially begun. Tin mining, flourishing beneath the colossal dam constructed by Malays in the 1700s, thrust Kuala Kubu into economic prominence. In 1875, Frank



The small park overlooking the Sungai Selangor Dam and Lake

Swettenham, the First Assistant Resident of Selangor, marvelled at the dam's enormity during his visit, and over time, the small town's tin mining activities rivalled Kuala Lumpur's.

In the spotty and occasionally murky tales of the area's history, Kuala Kubu emerges as a testament to the almost cyclical churn of conflict, resilience, resolution, and economic vitality. Names such as Raja Abdullah, Raja Ismail, Tengku Kudin, Raja Mahadi, and Syed Mashhor echo through time, their roles in the wide-ranging Selangor Civil War shaping Kuala Kubu's destiny. This historical narrative frames the tin mining town as an integral player in Selangor's multifaceted story, where layers of cultural heritage are interwoven with a little-known history.

But it still leaves the question, why the Bharu now?

Well, that massive dam – which for decades had held back the waters of Sungai Selangor – was not to endure forever. Amid a heavy rainfall on October 29, 1883, the dam broke apart. The raging waters that were unleashed by the dam's collapse wiped out everything that stood in the way, including virtually all of Kuala Kubu. In all, nearly 40 homes were swept away and 50 people perished, including an Englishman, local magistrate Cecil Ranking. A legend arose at the time which endures today – that of the white crocodile, said to be not only a harmless creature, but the guardian of the river. As the tale was told, Ranking shot and killed this rare white crocodile and boasted about it. The resultant curse led to the dam's failure and the town's destruction.

The crocodile curse notwithstanding, the town was rebuilt, but in 1926, another dam break in conjunction with a historic





Jing Loong Shan Wan Fo Shih Temple



Scenic views at the lake



Darul Quran Mosque

flood again laid waste to Kuala Kubu, destroying virtually everything except the Guan Yin Gu Si Temple and Al-Hidayah Mosque – at least as the story goes. Apparently, this was the final straw, so the British relocated the town to higher ground, and – as savvy readers may have already guessed – Kuala Kubu Bharu was born.

**WHERE NATURE MEETS HERITAGE**

Today, KKB is an easy, breezy drive north from Greater KL, taking a little over an hour, depending on your start point and, as always, traffic. We think the best route is via the impressive Rawang Bypass (Route 37), easily one of Malaysia's more remarkable stretches of highway for a couple of reasons. First, having opened in

late November 2017 and slashing a previously two-hour slog to just 30 minutes, the bypass highway is federally funded, meaning it's rather shockingly not a tollway. Second, and this is even more noteworthy, this soaring elevated highway – at heights of nearly 60 m over the ground far below, it's Malaysia's highest – owes much of its breathtaking design and engineering (both the elevation and sweeping, graceful curves) to a super-rare and critically endangered tree, *Hopea subalata*. Known locally as 'Giam Kanching', this species is hyper-endemic, found only in this one little patch of Selangor that's part of the Kanching Forest Reserve. Apparently, considerable pains were taken to avoid cutting down large numbers of Giam Kanching trees,





Street art in KKB

which can now be seen at canopy height as you make your way north.

Driving along the Rawang Bypass probably isn't as awe-inspiring as seeing drone video shot from above it, but it's still pretty impressive. And all along the drive northward, there are trailheads, waterfalls, and small lakes. There's also a gorgeous Buddhist temple, Jing Loong Shin Wan Fo Shih, that's a short hop off the main road after you get off the bypass between Rawang and Serendah. Just nearby is another temple, Liang Liang, and though not quite as ornate, it's still plenty appealing. For anyone interested in such temples, it's a slight backtrack, but a detour well worth taking. Afterward, it's very easy to jump back on the main road and continue heading north.



Guan Yin Gu See Temple



Sungai Selangor Dam



A family enjoys an early lunch along KKB's art street

After you pass through the townships of Batang Kali and Rasa, just beyond the Jamek Al-Khalidiah mosque, there is a choice of two routes that both continue on to KKB, the proverbial 'fork in the road.' Bail off the busier route and take the road on the right, Jalan Ampang Pecah. (The road's name, also the name of the district in which KKB lies, means 'broken dam,' an enduring nod to the disaster that transformed everything in this area.) This route is a bit slower, but it's more interesting, and certainly more scenic.

As you reach the tiny township of Ampang Pecah, it's worth noting you'll be on the original site of the Kuala Kubu of old. (The new version, KKB, lies at a modestly higher elevation just north.) But what's particularly worth seeing here is another nice Buddhist temple, Guan Yin Gu See, and the lovely Darul Quran mosque, which is sited on a little thumb



KKB Hot Springs

of land that juts out into Huffaz Lake. Best viewed from an unnamed road that runs along the lakefront, this is one of the most picturesque scenes on the way to KKB. Another side trip here takes you to the Cherandong Waterfall, which together with its well-marked hiking trail, is truly an underrated gem in Selangor.

#### EXPLORING THE TOWN... AND SETTLING IN

Proceeding on, you'll soon arrive in KKB, which is about as charming a small rural





Sungai Selangor's beautiful lake



Cheap and cheerful... Malaysia's favourite breakfast

Malaysian town as you'd ever hope to find. We were delighted by the clean streets and beautiful murals and other artwork we found on some back alleyways – purely by accident! Reminiscent of the street art found in Kuantan, KKB's creative alleys are just one of the town's hidden treasures. We nipped into a small Chinese coffee shop that's been there since well before Malaysia's independence to have our midmorning breakfast. Nothing fancy here, mind you – just basic, tasty, and very local food and beverages, served fast and cheap. *Kaya* toast, *nasi lemak bungkus*, *kopi O*, *teh tarik*, half-boiled eggs... the longer you're in Malaysia, the more you'll start seeing this as morning comfort food.

Suitably sated, we set out on foot and explored what you could tongue-in-cheek call 'Downtown KKB' – and that's where



Peaceful jungle views at Sarang by the Brook

we stumbled on the main artistic alleyway, running parallel to and in between Jalan Mat Kilau and Jalan Dato' Tabal.

Day trips to KKB are easy enough, but deciding to stay overnight here definitely offered its own rewards. We were impressed with the accommodation options in and around KKB. The range of interesting options in such a small town – from woodland glamping properties to basic shophotels to authentic lakeside campsites – came as a real surprise. We chose Sarang by the Brook, an appealing jungle-sited retreat on the northern edge of town that brilliantly utilises upcycled old shipping containers as rooms. There are only 12 of them onsite, and they've all been nicely kitted out with air conditioning, comfortable beds, and full en suite bathroom. There's a sparkling clean and beautifully landscaped saltwater swimming pool, BBQ facilities and a full kitchen for self-catering use,



Clean streets and plenty of small-town charm





Chiling Waterfall

plenty of third-party activities for those who are keen, and a friendly and knowledgeable host. The lush jungle setting is idyllic, and it's clear this private little retreat has earned its excellent ratings on various travel sites.

The next day found us exploring the town on foot again. Walking around KKB, just a short distance from Sarang, is undeniably good exercise for the body and soul. There's a sense of a town that's at least partially locked in a time warp – and happy to remain so. Heritage shoplots, street art, pre-war buildings, an old theatre dating back to 1953, and plenty of charm and opportunities for discovery lurk seemingly around every corner. Just outside of town, on the western edge, you'll find the hot springs, Air Kolam Panas KKB. Open 24 hours, not so well-known, and free of charge, this is an interesting excursion – early mornings are said to be best – that's just 10 minutes from where we were staying.

#### BEYOND KKB

After spending a bit of time checking out an array of curio shops, cafés, and even small parks in the heart of town, we bid KKB adieu and headed on towards the mighty Sungai Selangor Dam, about 7 km east of KKB. There is a small roadside park affording spectacular views of the sprawling lake and forested mountains surrounding it. Rather curiously, the lake itself bears no name, but it's so big and prominent, you definitely can't miss it!

The road, Route 55, snakes alongside the southern and southeastern shores of the lake for a few kilometres, then breaks free and heads into the jungle, a twisting, narrow road that soon begins its steady ascent – defined by scores of winding switchbacks – to Fraser's Hill. Not far after leaving the lake behind, a trailhead to Air Terjun Sungai Chiling – the beautiful and well-known Chiling Waterfalls – is on the right-hand side. For outdoor enthusiasts, this is an easy hike well worth putting on your list.

For those less inclined to go tromping through the forest, a much more easily accessible waterfall, Air Terjun Semangkuk, can be found just a few kilometres further along Route 55. Visible from the road, Semangkuk offers a scenic stopping point, and there's a sizeable parking area on the opposite side of the road. The rocks and forest floor can get very slippery around the falls, so caution is warranted.

The trip to KKB, whether as a day trip or an overnight visit, can be easily combined with Fraser's Hill, if desired. And for those who don't want to go back to KL the same way, a loop route is possible via the road from Fraser's Hill to Raub, but instead of turning left at the main junction into Raub, head right on Route 8 towards Bentong, where you can pick up the Karak Highway (either at the Bentong toll interchange, or further along at Bukit Tinggi) for an express return to KL. ■

#### TRAVEL FILE

##### STAY

Sarang by the Brook, a small private retreat set in the jungle on the edge of KKB, offers clean, comfortable accommodation in reimagined shipping containers. Affordable, welcoming, and particularly good for nature lovers. Visit [sarangkkb.com](http://sarangkkb.com).

##### PLAY

Nature and water lovers are well-catered-for here, with hot springs, waterfalls, white water rafting, and jungle trekking all easily found. There's even an 18-hole golf course at the KKB Golf & Country Club. Visit [primalcreations.com](http://primalcreations.com) for an array of outdoor activities and experiences.

##### EAT

KKB's traditional old Chinese coffee shops are worth checking out. Two that we visited serve fast, tasty, local dishes, with the focus on breakfast and lunch times. Restoran Wong Ng Kee (25 Jalan Mat Kilau, closes at 7pm) has a history dating back over 75 years, while Sun Sun Nam Cheong (8 Jalan Mat Kilau, closes at 3pm) is also a fine choice.

On the same street, the Muslim-friendly T.S. Taste of Spices (24A Jalan Mat Kilau, closes at 6pm) serves up terrific banana leaf and other authentic South Indian cuisine (lunch/late lunch). If you're craving Indian food for dinner, head to Restoran Ferozpur Curry House (18 Jalan Dato' Muda Jaafar), which is open until 10pm.

Also nearby, 98 Restoran (33 & 34 Jalan Dato' Balai, non-halal, closes at 9pm) is a great choice for lunch or dinner, offering reasonably priced and delicious seafood and Chinese cuisine. Check them out at [facebook.com/restaurantninetyeight](https://facebook.com/restaurantninetyeight).

##### SEE

To get a bird's-eye view of the drive along the remarkable Rawang Bypass, just scan the QR code.





# Fraser's Hill: A Cool Retreat to Convalesce



The highlands extend over several mountain ranges

**F**raser's Hill, one of a handful of hill stations established by the British, provided a cool retreat from the oppressive climatic conditions that some colonialists experienced in the Malaysian lowlands. While tin had already been mined on the hill in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it wasn't until near the end of World War I that there was renewed interest in developing the site perched on top of the Titiwangsa Range, some 100 km from Kuala Lumpur.

History has it that in 1917, the Right Reverend C. J. Ferguson-Davie, the then-Anglican Bishop of Singapore, was hiking in the hills with friends when he realised the area's potential as a cool holiday retreat. In 1909, Singapore had become an Anglican diocese covering the Straits Settlements, Peninsular Malaya, Siam, Java, Sumatra, and adjacent islands,

with Ferguson-Davie as its first bishop. The Diocese of Singapore and the Diocese of West Malaysia only became separated in 1970.

One of the bishop's immediate priorities was to identify suitable refuges for soldiers who needed a place to convalesce after serving in the war. Fraser's Hill was identified, and within a few years, three convalescent homes were opened on Fraser's Hill.

## REGIONAL MOUNTAIN RETREATS

At the end of WWI, other mountainous locations throughout the empire were also established as venues for ex-servicemen and women to recuperate. The potential for Fraser's Hill to be used as a mountain retreat was identified by the bishop while he was holidaying at the Gap Resthouse with A. B. Champion, the

Chaplain of Selangor. Both clerics had set off from the Gap for some recreational hiking and reportedly, to search for the remnants of the tin mining operation at the hill summit.

Southeast Asia's first holiday resorts were mostly mountainous regions, and they became known as hill stations. Malaysia has four such locations: Penang, the Cameron Highlands, Fraser's Hill, and Maxwell's Hill (now Bukit Larut). In Vietnam, the French established Dalat, the Dutch settled on Bogor in Indonesia, and the British settled in Maymyo (now Pyin U Lwin) in Burma (now Myanmar).

Most of these hill stations have fascinating histories and settings that resemble distant lands that were intentionally created by the colonialists to remind them of life back home. The British set





Road to Fraser's Hill



Town Centre, Fraser's Hill (1930s)



about erecting Tudor Revival bungalows (Mock Tudor or, in Singapore, the Black and White House) based on stone and wood buildings from the Tudor era. These were set among gardens planted with temperate plants, and their interiors often featured an open fireplace. On cool days, colonialists could retreat for a cream tea of scones, clotted cream, and strawberry jam after a round of golf. No doubt, a glass of sherry was consumed prior to dinner, and after supper, the men would adjourn for a snifter of brandy and maybe a spot of billiards after an announcement had been made that jackets might be removed.

#### A THERAPEUTIC SITE

It was the possibility of setting up convalescent homes, or sanatoriums, that aroused interest in Fraser's Hill. Firstly, it's worth reflecting on life in Europe and Malaya at the time. Up until the mid-19th century, overseas travel for most was out of the question, and private journeys were really only the domain of the wealthy. Globally, Thomas Cook is regarded as the instigator of mass tourism when he realised the value of the evolving British rail network in transporting all classes of people over relatively long distances ('now everyone can travel').

The European rail network was quick to follow, and by the late 19th century, tourists could easily move around the continent. Concurrently, there was a belief among the medical profession that mountains, especially the Swiss Alps, were 'a place of healing.' This ensured the





Victory Bungalow, Fraser's Hill (Cambridge Janus Collection)

Alps became a favoured venue, especially for the treatment of lung diseases.

High-altitude fresh air had a therapeutic effect on patients and soon gave rise to health tourism in Switzerland. The curative regime at the health resorts involved drinking fresh spring water, hydrotherapy, and, of course, inhaling the pure mountain air.

The first organised holidays to Switzerland were offered during the latter part of the 19th century by Thomas Cook and Lunn Travel. Initially, tourism in Switzerland was exclusively for the rich until it became more widely accessible in the 20th century.

Tuberculosis (TB) had reached epidemic levels in Europe in the 19th century, with a

mortality rate as high as 900 deaths per 100,000 population per year in Western Europe. Between 1851 and 1910, around four million people died from TB in England and Wales - more than one-third of those aged 15 to 34 and half of those aged 20 to 24.

All this must have been foremost in the mind of Ferguson-Davie when Fraser's Hill was proposed as a restive holiday destination in Malaya. The bishop submitted a report to the government authorities to establish the highlands as a suitable place for soldiers to recuperate on their return from the war.

His ideas were considered and accepted, with the initial work on the hills beginning in 1918. This could not have been timelier because there was an outbreak of influenza as World War I came to an end in 1918. The countries involved in the war suppressed news of the influenza outbreak in order to maintain morale among the troops. However, journalists in neutral Spain reported on it, leading to its misnomer as the Spanish Flu. K. K. Liew's article, *Terribly Severe Though Mercifully Short: The Episode of the 1918 Influenza in British Malaya*, is an insightful read into the devastating impacts of the influenza on those living in Malaya at the time.

The Malayan population came into contact with the influenza as troops, officials, and travellers returned from



Expat family at Clifford Bungalow, Fraser's Hill, July 1956





Mock Tudor bungalow and garden



Bunge Bungalow

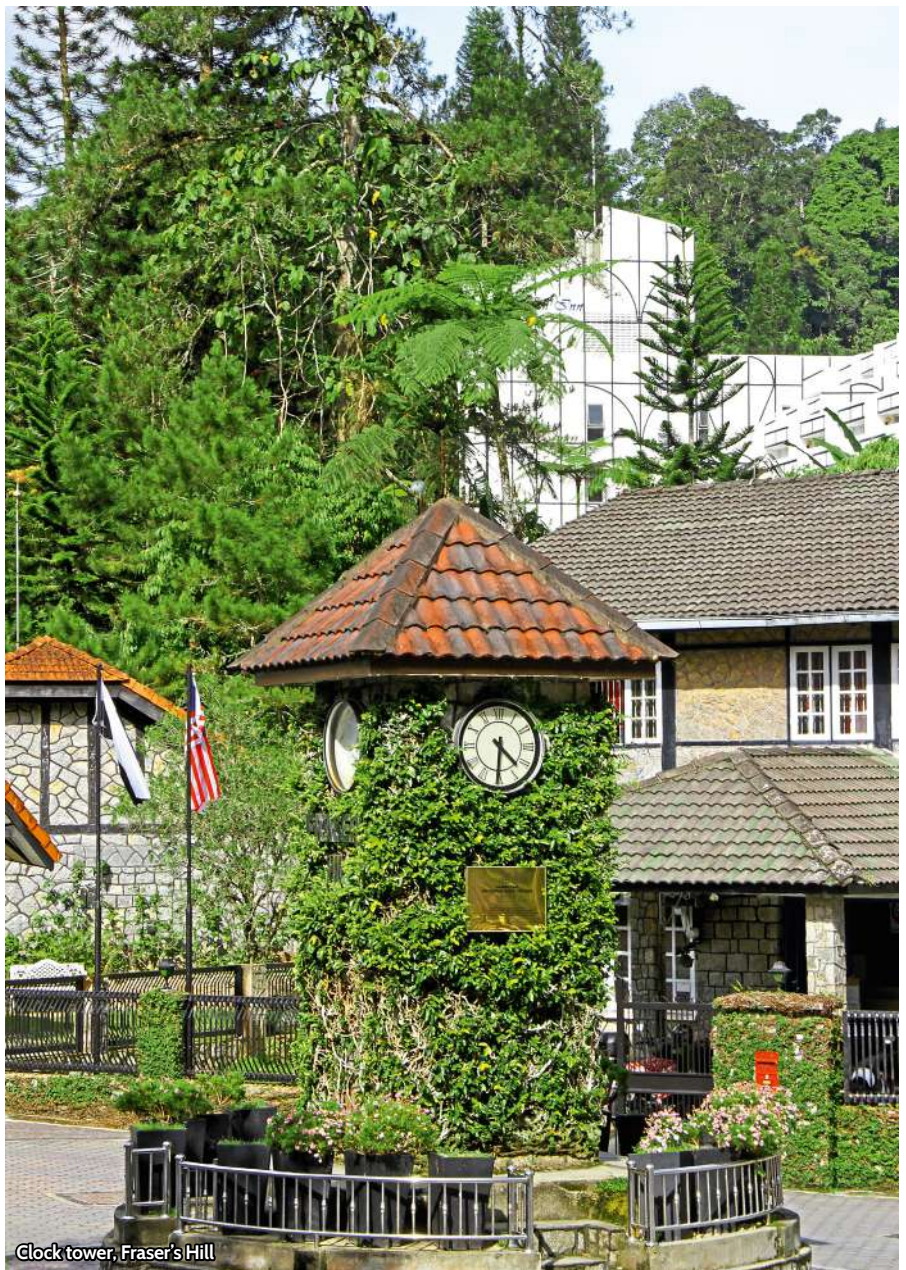
Europe. Almost 40,000 people reportedly died from the pandemic, with this being even more dramatic than one might think, as the figure represented one percent of the population at the time. Then, expats must have been keen to escape from the influenza-infected lowlands to the cool, clean air of destinations like Fraser's Hill.

### A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT

One of the principal reasons behind the development of hill stations was the belief that these high-altitude outposts provided a healthier environment. A week spent in the cool mountain air, playing golf, hiking, and relaxing with other expats was ideal for heart-weary colonialists. It's also worth remembering that it was then almost impossible for expats to 'escape' for the weekend; there were no short breaks to Phuket or Bali available at the time. Holidays or weekend escapes would have been spent within Malaya, where the transportation infrastructure was also quite limited.

Not only were the hills suitable for the convalescing members of the British military, but government officials and the management of large private corporations also recognised their potential for rest and recreation for their staff, many of whom were expatriates.

Mr. F. W. Mager, Pahang State Engineer, was instructed to survey the area and to



Clock tower, Fraser's Hill





commence construction of a new access road from the Gap to the Fraser's Hill summit. Fraser's disused tin mine was to be the centre of the resort, with the wide valley earmarked for a golf course that is still in use.

The hill resort was officially opened to visitors in 1922. Buildings soon sprung up, built in the 'colonial style' between 1919 and 1957, and many still stand, with 46 officially designated as heritage buildings. These include British government bungalows built to house officials of the administration; private bungalows for use by senior company staff employed in trades such as tin and rubber; and public

buildings including the post office and the police station.

#### CONVALESCENT AND COSY

Three sanatoriums, or convalescent homes, were established, with one still intact and operating as the most welcoming and cosy – Ye Olde Smokehouse, a colonial boutique property with just a handful of rooms, a bar, and a restaurant.

After the horrors of World War I, many ex-soldiers returned to civilian life and employment in Malaya, principally as public servants, plantation managers, or tin miners. Funds were raised in the

United Kingdom to honour the service of the returned soldiers by providing retreats where they could rest and relax and, in some cases, recuperate.

The British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem raised funds to construct a number of buildings on Fraser's Hill. These were to be sanatoria for those men and women of the Imperial Forces who served between 1914 and 1918 and their dependents. The Red Cross House, now Ye Olde Smokehouse, opened in 1924.

Victory on Lady Maxwell's Road opened two years later and featured a lounge, dining room, sitting room, and two double bedrooms on the ground floor, and a sitting room, veranda, and four double bedrooms upstairs. Booking priority was given to those ex-service personnel who could present a medical certificate for their own health or that of a family member. When opened in mid-1926, the building was originally called Convalescent; however, this name was later adopted by its sister building, which opened in January 1927 in the Selangor part of Fraser's Hill (the Selangor-Pahang border bisects the hilltop settlement).

Rules were put in place at Victory, and no doubt the others. These included rule number nine: 'the staff consists of a servant in charge, a cook, and two water carriers; visitors are requested to bring their own personal servants,' and rule number 10: 'visitors who bring amahs or ayahs and wish them to occupy a bedroom must provide their own beds, mattresses, and bed linen. In no case will an amah or ayah be allowed to make use of any bed or bedding provided in the house.'

Maintenance has not always been a priority for the bungalows and public buildings on Fraser's Hill, and sadly, Victory is now empty, derelict, and probably well beyond restoration as the ever-encroaching jungle has taken control.

Convalescent (now Rumah Rehat Sri Berkat), on Padang Road in Selangor, isn't quite derelict, but it appears to be just hanging in there. This means Red Cross House is the only former convalescent home that is still habitable.

#### YE OLDE SMOKEHOUSE

This small colonial hotel that originally







Ye Olde Smokehouse, present day



Ye Olde Smokehouse, Fraser's Hill (Cambridge Janus Collection)



English afternoon tea, Ye Olde Smokehouse



Lounge, Ye Olde Smokehouse

opened as the Red Cross House was built by the Department of Public Works, and its first guests checked in during the middle of 1924.

The property reverted to an inn some years later, and in 1988, it began operating as Ye Olde Smokehouse Fraser's Hill (smokehouse.my). Since then, it has offered comfortable country house hospitality with 14 rooms, a lounge, a restaurant, and a bar. The property offers all the charm of an old English inn, with the suites having good facilities, including en suite bathrooms.

Ye Olde Smokehouse offers a nostalgic English experience and is one of only two places on the hill to enjoy an alcoholic beverage. Beyond a nice tippie, guests can enjoy afternoon cream teas of freshly

baked scones, strawberry jam, cream, and a pot of Malaysian tea. There is a small bar with a log fireplace and an adjoining restaurant that serves traditional English fare. Diners can expect traditional English fare such as Mulligatawny soup, beef Wellington, fish and chips, and sherry trifle.

The interiors are circa 1920, with several retaining some original furniture. Mod cons are limited, but that's the point of staying here; it's a journey back to a more peaceful and uncomplicated era.

Being of a bygone era, Fraser's Hill faces a dilemma. Its development appears stifled as tourism numbers dwindle, followed by expenditure on maintenance also lapsing, and then still fewer people visit. Now that exotic regional destinations are within many people's reach, nearby hill stations don't have the magnetic appeal they once had.

Fraser's Hill will especially appeal to those who enjoy relaxing and making their own fun in a cool location. Book a room at Ye Olde Smokehouse and travel here with an open mind to enjoy a comfortable stay in cosy accommodation where life moves at a decidedly slower pace.

While several buildings are designated as heritage, many visitors may be puzzled as to what this means, as most are poorly maintained and sadly falling apart. One building was even pulled down a few years ago, so its heritage status doesn't appear to have offered much protection.

If there were ever a Malaysian setting trapped in a time warp, it would be Fraser's Hill. While its slow pace of life and general lack of modern facilities may not have universal appeal, others will enjoy the refreshingly cool and unhurried hilltop setting. ■





# Selangor's Crab Island



**T**here is something about Malaysian islands that makes my heart beat faster. I just can't get enough of the sight of palm-fringed beaches, white sand, and crystal-clear blue waters. Most of these gorgeous islands are located on the east coast of Malaysia – or on the west coast starting from Pangkor Island all the way up toward Thailand. However, the islands of Selangor are relatively unknown. Yes, Selangor has its own islands! Surprised?

Not all islands are blessed with white sandy beaches, though. But before you decide to stop reading, I'd like to tell you more about the islands in Selangor. There are five or six islands located in front of Port Klang, which are all in close vicinity of the harbour. Instead of white sand, you'll find mud here – in abundance. One of those mud islands is called Pulau Ketam, which means Crab Island. (Perhaps Mud Island would have been a more suitable name!) The pile of mud is just strong enough to support the timber homes, built on stilts. Does the





island even deserve the suffix 'land'? The island is actually one big mud hill, barely raised above the surface of the Straits of Malacca. Okay, enough mudslinging. Let's take a closer look at Crab Island.

#### A BIT OF HISTORY

In the 19th century, Malaysian fishermen of Chinese descent came regularly to Pulau Ketam, to fish for crab. It didn't take long for them to realise that it would be useful to build a house there, to spend the

night when seas were too rough to return home to Port Klang. More people followed and a few decades later, almost 100 fishermen lived on the island between the mangrove trees.

During the Second World War, Malaya was occupied by the Japanese, so many people fled to Pulau Ketam from the mainland. Because of this, the population increased tenfold. What was once a collection of houses turned into a village,







connected by concrete dikes and bridges, and the first regular ferry service was started by the Hai Ann Ferry Company.

Crab hunting can be monotonous, so the fishermen, perhaps bored with the grey and brown colours of the mud, painted their wooden houses in the most beautiful vibrant colours. Very Instagrammable!

**THE ONLY WAY TO GET AROUND**

It's deafening, the sound of silence. One of the first things you notice when you set foot on 'land' is the absence of noise. A bit later, we understand why. At the harbour, you can see electric rental bike shops. Bikes like this are the only means of transport allowed on Pulau Ketam. Cars are not allowed, which only adds to the village-feel on the island.

The bikes cost RM20 per hour, but you can bargain if you want to ride them for more than two hours. Traffic rules don't really

exist and helmets are not available, but you do get useful advice for free: always stay on the left hand side of the road.

Children 12 years and older are allowed to ride the bikes themselves. Until that age, they can simply join you on the back seat. My 14-year-old son and his friend had no problem riding a bike by themselves, while our 10-year-old daughter had fun sitting behind dad and watch the island life go by.

**SNAKES AND DOGS**

Pulau Ketam has its share of nice Buddhist and Taoist temples. A particularly interesting one is the Snake Temple, where a giant snake is kept as a pet in front of the temple. You can also ride to several smaller jetties around the island; they have very nice views across the water. On top of the many bridges connecting the mud piles, you can take great pics of the waterways and boats passing by.





Keep an eye out for Nico, the bike-loving dog. He will walk up slowly toward you and demand its space on your bike. He will tap on your knee when he wants to get off. Nico is funny and completely harmless.

#### TRUE TO ITS NAME

We came to Pulau Ketam with the

intention to eat to our hearts' content and yes, we did succeed! Especially at the harbour, you will find many restaurants, all of which sell a wide variety of seafood at very reasonable prices. Choose a place with a crowd and you are guaranteed to have a good meal. Chili crab, pepper crab, steamed fish, and shellfish... it is all deliciously prepared and easy to wash

down with a cold drink of your choice.

Pulau Ketam has more to offer than just grey mud, which is lucky for us mainlanders, because from Kuala Lumpur it is a great destination for a day out. If the traffic is kind, you can reach Port Klang within 45 minutes from KLCC. From here you can take a ferry to the island from the passenger terminal. There is not a single white beach to be found on Pulau Ketam, but it is nevertheless a great place to explore. ■

#### TRAVEL FILE

##### HOW TO GET THERE

The ferry from Port Klang takes approximately 40 minutes to Pulau Ketam. Get out at the second jetty. For the curious traveller: there is nothing to see at the first jetty. Please do not disembark here. Boats leave every half hour during peak times.

##### WHERE TO STAY

Planning to stay overnight? Why not? Do make use of the many long weekends fortunate to enjoy in Malaysia and book one of the few Airbnbs the island has to offer.





Buddhist monks in front of Angkor Wat

# A People Tested by Tragedy

Cambodia's long and rich history has been punctuated by periods of stunning achievement and times of profound cruelty and destruction. Editor **Chad Merchant** takes a closer look at this ASEAN nation with a turbulent and often painful history and finds in its remarkable people a surprising and steady optimism.



Harvesting the rice, Cambodia

Cambodia is an enigma for many reasons. Its people and culture are both as open and accessible to the initiated traveller as any in the region, but the country is unquestionably still burdened by reminders of the horrors of its recent past. Many people cannot even hear the name of the country without thinking of the genocidal campaign that saw fully a quarter of Cambodia's entire population wiped out in the 1970s, or the civil wars that ravaged the countryside and left a bitter legacy of landmines and lives ruined years after the fighting had ended. Cambodia has struggled mightily to find its footing, and that struggle continues today. But there are signs of progress, and the people of Cambodia – who would certainly have every reason to feel hopeless and miserable – are often praised by visitors for their congenial smiles and warmth, an abiding optimism





that belies the difficult lives many of these people lead.

#### KINGDOM OF WONDER

The earliest beginnings of Cambodia can be traced – though inconclusively – as far back as around 6000 BCE. More solid archaeological findings support human occupation from approximately the third millennium BCE, with Iron Age settlements being found throughout the area dating back to 500 BCE. Over the next millennium, settlements came and went, and minor empires rose and fell, the Funan and Chenla prominent among them. From these kingdoms, the dominant power of the time coalesced.

The Khmer Empire, which would become the largest and strongest in Southeast Asian history, was firmly established in 802, when Jayavarman II declared Khmer independence from Java and proclaimed himself as *devaraja*, a ‘god-king’ designation transcending a mere mortal monarchy. Jayavarman II reigned over the empire from 790 to 850 and set it on a path of unimagined glory.

For some 600 years, the Khmer Empire controlled vast swaths of territory in present-day Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. The golden age, lasting from the 9th to 13th centuries, saw the construction of magnificent palaces and temples all over the territory, most notably the capital city of Angkor, the seat of Khmer power, located just outside present-day Siem Reap. These architectural masterpieces – originally numbering in the hundreds – were spread over a vast 1,000-sq km area that was, in 2007, determined to have been home to

by far the largest pre-industrial city in history, larger than modern Paris and supporting perhaps as many as a million people. The temples of Angkor showcase the sheer genius of the Khmer Empire, using technology, water storage and dispersal methods, and construction techniques all considerably ahead of its time. The scale, the grandeur, the details and finesse, and the impressive feat of transporting millions of stones – many weighing over 1,000 kg – from distant quarries all ensures that the ancient temples of Angkor leave an impression today matched by few archaeological sites on Earth.

#### AFTER ANGKOR: THE DARK AGES

The golden age of the Khmer Empire, however, declined in the 13th and 14th



centuries, and took an abrupt turn for the worse in 1431 when Angkor was sacked by neighbouring Ayutthaya. The 15th through 19th centuries were marked by both territorial and monetary losses due to the growing power of neighbouring empires in Siam and Vietnam. The Vietnamese Empire annexed much of Cambodia’s most prosperous areas, and their settlement of the Mekong Delta cut Cambodia off from the sea, resulting in massive losses from the lack of trade. This period came to be known as the dark ages of Cambodia.

Phnom Penh was established as the capital with the founding of the city by King Ponhea Yat in 1434, but later relocated to Angkor, then Lovek, then Oudang. Four hundred years after its founding, the capital was returned to Phnom Penh by King Norodom the First, who came into power in 1834. King Norodom negotiated a deal with France for Cambodia to become a protectorate in hopes of saving his country from further decline and to protect itself from its increasingly powerful neighbours. In 1863, Cambodia became part of French Indochina, and remained a self-governing protectorate for 90 years, with only a brief interruption of Japanese occupation during World War II.

The weak Vichy government in France during World War II left Cambodia in a dire situation: without any real protection. During this time, Thai Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram took advantage of the unprotected colony and invaded the western provinces. Cambodia gained independence in 1953 with the rest of French Indochina in part through the





Buddhist Stupa at Choeng Ek

Geneva Accords, the bankrupt French government, and the strong will and negotiating skills of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who later became king, then the country's first Prime Minister, and later, the king once again.

During the Vietnam War, Sihanouk allowed Cambodia to be a haven and supply route for the Northern Vietnamese communists, leading to secret bombings by the United States in Cambodia. When being interviewed by *The Washington Post* in 1967, Sihanouk stated that he would not oppose American involvement in Cambodia so long as the bombing campaign targeted the Vietnamese, and not Cambodians. However, the U.S. incursions directly and indirectly lead to the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent Cambodians. This was, sadly, but a shadow of the horrors yet to be endured by the country.

### CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE AND CIVIL WAR

In 1970, while Sihanouk was on a diplomatic visit to Beijing, the anti-Communist Prime Minister Lon Nol lead the army in a bloodless *coup d'état* with the help of the Americans. In exile in China, Sihanouk urged his followers to oppose Lon Nol's corrupt and incompetent regime, which lead to the rise of the Cambodian Communist Party, now known as the Khmer Rouge, or Red Khmer. The Khmer Rouge took over the country in 1975, greeted by cheers from people eager for stability. These cheers soon fell silent under the ruthless leadership of Pol Pot, as the Khmer Rouge took Cambodia back to the Stone Age, implementing an anti-intellectual

campaign, killing anyone with any form of education and destroying anything related to religion or Western thinking. In search of a utopian and agrarian state, Pol Pot and his army abolished money, religion, and all forms of private property; everyone worked in large, rural labour camps, where food was scarce. The Khmer Rouge banned by proclamation the very existence of ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Buddhist monks, and Muslim Cham, along with 18 other minority groups, and the massacre began and continued in earnest for over three years. The resulting campaign has been described as "the worst disaster to befall any ethnic Chinese community in Southeast Asia."

Estimates vary, but it's generally accepted that at least two million people died during the three-year rule of the Khmer

Rouge, representing – staggeringly – a quarter of Cambodia's then-population of eight million and standing as one of the bleakest horrors in modern human history. Many of these deaths came from starvation and exhaustion, but up to a million and a half people were killed by execution at notorious places such as the 'Killing Fields' and S-21 (Tuol Sleng) Prison. Monks in particular were massacred *en masse*, with only 800 to 1,000 surviving out of some 60,000. Roughly 95% of the Buddhist temples in Cambodia were destroyed. The Muslim Cham were also decimated, with perhaps 500,000 killed out of a population of 700,000. It was a brutal campaign of purification set not only along racial lines, but social, religious, political, and intellectual lines, as well. Children taken from condemned Cambodians were not exempt from the genocidal campaign either, many being killed in accordance with Khmer Rouge policy, which stated, "There is no gain to keep them, and they might [grow up to] take revenge on you."

With the early 1979 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia marking the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, the arduous task of rebuilding the traumatised nation should have commenced. However, even after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, a decade of intermittent civil war plagued the country, prolonging the death and devastation of its people and lands. For the weary people of Cambodia, a much longed-for peace was still out of reach.

### PARIS PEACE ACCORDS AND A ROAD TO RECOVERY

In October 1991, an agreement was reached in Paris for a political solution to



National Museum of Cambodia





## FACT FILE

### CAMBODIA

**Size:** 181,035 sq km (World rank: 88th)

**Population:** 16,713,015 (2022 estimate; about 17 million estimated for 2024)

**Capital city:** Phnom Penh

**Largest city:** Phnom Penh

**Government:** Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy

**Official language:** Khmer

**GDP PPP\*:** \$6,541

**HDI\*\*:** 0.593, medium (World rank: 146th)

**Currency:** Cambodian riel (1MYR = 867KHR)

\*GDP per capita, purchasing power parity, international dollars

\*\*Human Development Index, a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, standards of living, per capita income, and quality of life for countries worldwide. (For comparison, Malaysia's HDI is now 0.803, very high, and is ranked 62nd.)

### Notable facts:

Cambodia's name is derived from the ancient Sanskrit word pronounced as "Kambuja." It is known as *Kāmpūchéa* in the Khmer language and is referred to colloquially by Cambodians as *Srok Khmer*, or "The Land of the Khmers." Colonized by the French in 1863, Cambodia gained its independence nearly a century later on 9 November 1953. Forty difficult years would then pass before the restoration of the monarchy, beginning Cambodia's modern era.

One of Cambodia history's darkest chapters occurred fairly recently with the rise of the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1970s, immediately following the end of the Cambodian Civil War. The communist regime seized power and, led by Pol Pot, was responsible for one of the worst cases of genocide in contemporary history as it sought to eliminate all traces of capitalism and Western influence from society. Estimates of the number of people exterminated before the Khmer Rouge was toppled in 1979 during the Cambodian-Vietnamese War are as high as three million (out of a total population of eight million at the time).

Since the early 1990s, Cambodia has slowly emerged from the shadow of war and genocide under the provisions of a peace accord initiated in Paris in 1989. Today, the Kingdom of Cambodia bears little resemblance to the war-torn nation of the 1970s and tourism is a strong contributor to the economy, the second greatest source of income in the nation (after textiles).

Cambodia is home to the largest freshwater lake in ASEAN, Tonlé Sap, essentially a river-fed alluvial floodplain that is inundated seasonally, dramatically increasing the size of the lake and allowing travel by boat between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. At its maximum, Tonlé Sap Lake measures roughly 250 km in overall length, with an estimated surface area of some 16,000 sq km. The lake, both vast and relatively shallow, contains a large variety of interconnected ecological regions with a high degree of biodiversity, and was so named as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1997.

Cambodia has one of the more homogenous populations of the ASEAN nations, with some 90% of Cambodians being of Khmer origin and speaking that language. (Theravada Buddhism is the official religion and is practised or recognised by over 95% of the population.) Additionally, as a result of the civil wars and genocide of the 1970s, half of Cambodia's entire population is under roughly 27 years of age today, with 65% of the population currently under the age of 30.

years of armed struggle in Cambodia. The UN sent 22,000 troops to enforce and aid the transition, and in May 1993, a general election was held, the monarchy re-established, and Sihanouk reclaimed the throne as the Cambodian King, holding the position until his abdication in 2004. His son, King Norodom Sihamoni succeeded to the throne and remains the reigning monarch today.

Currently benefiting from over two decades of stability, Cambodia is on the slow but steady track to economic progress, having endured regional wars, colonisation, occupation, civil war, and the murderous rule of the Khmer Rouge. Foreign investment from China and Vietnam, as well as an effort to reduce the dependence on foreign aid assures that the country is on its way to recovery. Tourism, of course, plays a big part, as well, with visits to the country soaring in recent years, pushing tourism to its current position as the country's second-biggest economic contributor, behind textiles.

Yet despite having one of the world's most magnificent archaeological treasures right in its backyard, Cambodia's real wealth is in its people. Struggling and suffering through years of bloodshed, poverty, and political instability with an indefatigable spirit and surprising optimism in the face of such travails, Cambodians somehow seem to have endured, and even prevailed with their smiles largely intact. No visitor comes away without a measure of admiration and affection for the inhabitants of this enigmatic kingdom of wonder. ■





# Airlines & Travel

## KL-SINGAPORE RANKED WORLD'S BUSIEST INTERNATIONAL ROUTE

Aviation analytics firm OAG has published its report on the busiest airline routes for 2023, with Kuala Lumpur International-Singapore Changi topping the list of international routes. The route had a total of 4.9 million seats last year, pushing Cairo-Jeddah down to second spot with 4.8 million seats.

Seven of the top 10 busiest international routes involved Asia-Pacific destinations, with Hong Kong-Taipei taking third spot with 4.6 million seats (down around 43% on 2019 levels). New York JFK-London Heathrow came in eighth position with 3.9 million seats.

However, these figures are far smaller than those for the busiest domestic routes for 2023, with Jeju International – Seoul Gimpo seeing 13.7 million seats, followed by Sapporo New Chitose – Tokyo Haneda (11.9 million) and Fukuoka – Tokyo Haneda (11.3 million).

In terms of airports, OAG's data shows that Atlanta was the busiest global hub in 2023, followed by Dubai International, Tokyo Haneda and London Heathrow.

Heathrow reported its highest-ever September passenger numbers in 2023, in a month which also saw the airport's monthly passenger figures exceed the equivalent period in 2019 for the first time since February 2020.

Commenting on the news, John Grant, chief analyst at OAG, said, "Asia continues to have the busiest routes in the world due to its popularity as a tourism hotspot." He also noted, "Although capacity is not back to 2019 levels, London Heathrow remains a pivotal hub for global air travel."

*To learn more, visit [oag.com](http://oag.com).*



## ASCOTT LIMITED INKS EIGHT NEW PROPERTY DEALS UNDER LYF BRAND

The Ascott Limited, the wholly owned lodging arm of Singapore's CapitaLand Investment, has signed eight new properties under its chic lyf (pronounced 'life') hotel brand, including two more here in Malaysia. The properties are lyf Bugis Singapore; lyf Brickfields Kuala Lumpur and lyf Georgetown Penang in Malaysia; lyf Canggu Bali in Indonesia; lyf on Sussex Sydney in Australia; lyf Shibuya Tokyo in Japan; and lyf Frankfurt in Germany, as well as an additional property in Shanghai, China.

These properties, which collectively offer a total of close to 1,500 units, are scheduled to open over the next four years.

The lyf brand is currently present in 21 cities around the world with over 5,500 units both operating and in the pipeline. There is currently a lyf hotel in Chinatown

in Kuala Lumpur (pictured), which opened last year.

"The lyf brand has captured the attention of the market with its dynamic designs, flexible spaces, and well-curated programming with the community at its core," says Serena Lim, chief growth officer at Ascott. "Owners and investors alike have seen the resilience and continued demand for experience-led social living that lyf has been synonymous with, an accommodation trend that has been made more pronounced post-pandemic and we believe is here to stay."

Ascott and CLI Lodging CEO Kevin Goh said that there is "tremendous potential" to further scale the lyf brand across more hospitality asset classes, including a full-service hotel or resort.

"With more than 30 lyf properties both in



operation and under development, Ascott will bring lyf to even more destinations in the year ahead, as we work towards our target of 150 properties with over 30,000 units by 2030," Goh added.

Alongside the announcement of the eight properties, lyf has also appointed a managing lyf partner to lead and propel the next phase of development and growth in the brand.

*To learn more, visit [discoverasr.com/en/lyf](http://discoverasr.com/en/lyf).*



## LEXIS GROUP TO OPEN TWO NEW HOTELS

Lexis Hotels & Resorts Sdn Bhd is set to open two new hotels with a total gross development value (GDV) of about RM1.22 billion amid an ongoing resurgence in tourist arrivals.

President Datuk Mandy Chew Siok Cheng said that the GDV of Imperial Lexis Kuala Lumpur, which is located in the city centre, stood at RM720 million, while Lexis Hibiscus 2, with a GDV of RM500 million, is located adjacent to the current Lexis Hibiscus in Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan.

“Imperial Lexis Kuala Lumpur is slated to welcome guests soon, while Lexis Hibiscus 2 is expected to be completed within five years,” she told the media. Chew further said that its current hotel, Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson, has recorded a growth in guests, particularly post-pandemic.

“Our annual New Year’s celebration held at Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson (pictured) attracted over 2,000 guests this year, a



100% increase from the previous year’s attendance of roughly 1,000 guests,” she added.

Lexis Hibiscus 2 will have over 1,000 rooms, and like Lexis Hibiscus, it will feature its own private pool in each villa for exclusivity and privacy. The luxury Imperial Lexis, meanwhile, will have 275 rooms and suites, and similarly, each will boast its own private pool.

The latest Hibiscus development is expected to draw around 400,000 tourists to Port Dickson every year, generating RM240 million per annum, of which 20% will go to the state government and its people in return for the 32 hectares of land on which the project will be built.

**For more information, visit [lexis.my](http://lexis.my).**

## NEW INTERCONTINENTAL TO OPEN IN KOTA KINABALU

IHG Hotels & Resorts has broken ground on the new InterContinental Sabah Kota Kinabalu Resort. The 450-room beachfront resort, located in Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah state in northern Borneo, is slated to open in 2027.

InterContinental Sabah Kota Kinabalu Resort aims to adopt environmentally friendly practices throughout its design, construction and operations, with all rooms, suites and villas offering a strong ‘back-to-nature’ theme steeped in Borneo culture.

Located just a 25-minute drive from Kota Kinabalu International airport, InterContinental Sabah Kota Kinabalu Resort will feature four restaurants and bars, 2,400 square metres of meeting space including 11 meeting rooms, a fitness centre, spa, kids club, three outdoor pools, and the brand’s signature Club InterContinental Lounge.

The resort will also offer activities that encourage guests to gain a deeper appreciation of nature and wildlife, including island hopping, snorkelling, forest walks, mangrove kayaking expeditions, and both firefly and proboscis monkey cruises. IHG currently has seven hotels across three brands – InterContinental Hotels &



Resorts, Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts and Holiday Inn Express – in Malaysia.

This is set to grow to 18 properties across six brands within the next five years as the group will introduce Regent Hotels & Resorts, Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts, and Hotel Indigo to the Malaysian market. The latter is set to open this month in Kuala Lumpur.

“Kota Kinabalu is one of the leading leisure destinations in Malaysia and an eco-tourism hub renowned for its nature-based attractions and rich cultural heritage. InterContinental Sabah Kota Kinabalu Resort will quickly become a ‘must-visit’ destination, sensitively situated and sustainably operated in alignment with IHG’s Journey to Tomorrow 10-year responsible business plan,” said Rajit Sukumaran, managing director, Southeast Asia and Korea, IHG Hotels & Resorts.

**For details, visit [ihg.com](http://ihg.com).**



## STARLUX AIRLINES BEGINS NEW ROUTE TO SAN FRANCISCO

Taiwan-based Starlux Airlines has launched a new nonstop service between its Taipei base and San Francisco, its second US gateway after Los Angeles. This new route adds another transpacific option for travellers from Kuala Lumpur, as flights to North America typically have a stopover in Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, or Tokyo. Initially, Starlux will operate the Taipei-San Francisco service three times a week.

Flight JX011 will leave San Francisco each Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 2340 and arrive in Taipei at 0530 two days later. Flight JX012 will leave Taipei at 2320 and arrive in San Francisco at 1815 on the same days.

Starlux will upgrade the Airbus A350-900 service to daily flights from March 20, 2024.

“The launch of our San Francisco to Taiwan route tops off an amazing series of milestones for Starlux,” said CEO Glenn Chai. “In January 2020, we took to the skies with three intra-Asia flights. Three years on, by staying focused on our vision and ambition, we have expanded our network and now fly to 22 destinations.”

Addressing the newest route, Chai added, “We launched our inaugural transpacific flight to Los Angeles in April, and now celebrate our second US destination, San Francisco.”

The Starlux A350-900s seat four in first class, 26 in business, 36 in premium economy (36 seats) and 240 in standard economy class. The first and business cabins come with sliding doors for added privacy.

For its SFO route launch, Starlux debuted a new 3-star Michelin menu from Taiwanese restaurant Tairorir in first class on flights departing Taipei to San Francisco. With effect from January 2024, first class passengers heading to Los Angeles will also be able to select these dishes.

**For information and booking, visit [starlux-airlines.com](http://starlux-airlines.com).**



# Nearly 80 and Looking Good: A Brief History of Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia's national carrier has navigated some extraordinarily challenging years and now looks poised to enter a period of growth and profitability. As Malaysia Airlines wraps up 77 years of history, here's a look back at the carrier's earliest days and how the it's evolved over the decades.



Malayan Airways DC-3 at Ipoh Airport, circa late 1950s



An old postcard featuring a Malayan Airways Bristol Britannia

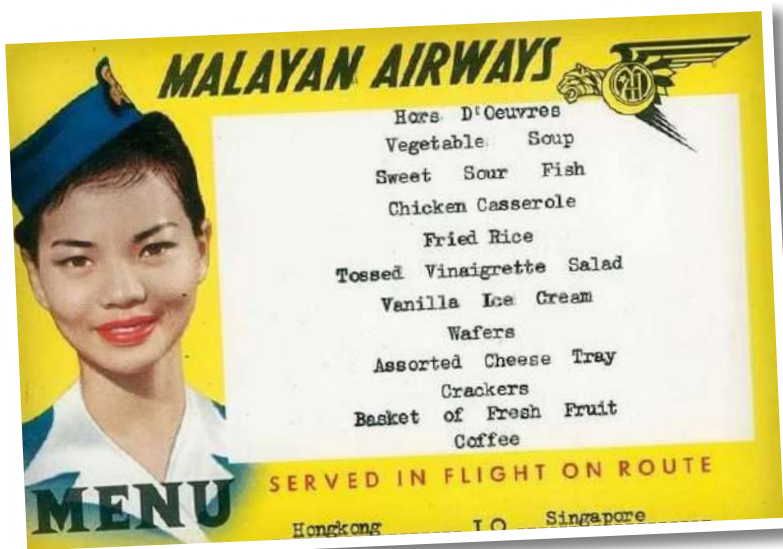
As 2024 gets underway, and several months after commemorating its 77th anniversary, it's accurate to say that – despite some difficult years encompassing everything from economic turmoil to the unprecedented loss of two aircraft in less than six months to a global pandemic – Malaysia Airlines still stands out as a prominent carrier in Asia, and its profile appears to be growing once again, too. Presently, the airline's extensive fleet of nearly 80 aircraft spans routes to 22 countries across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Oceania, complemented by a comprehensive domestic network. While the airline basks in its historical glory, the past couple of decades have unquestionably presented some exceptional challenges for Malaysia's flag carrier. Here's how Malaysia Airlines came to be the national airline we know today.

**A FAST-GROWING POST-WAR AIRLINE**  
The roots of Malaysia Airlines trace back

to 1947 when Malayan Airways Limited initiated its inaugural passenger flight, a period predating the existence of modern-day Malaysia. Operating out of Singapore, this post-World War II airline, a collaboration between the Straits Steamship Company and Imperial Airways, initially utilized Airspeed Consul twin-engine aircraft. The maiden voyage on April 2, 1947, carried five passengers from Singapore's Kallang Airport to Kuala Lumpur's Sungai Besi Airport.

Benefiting from collaboration with airlines from friendly nations, Malayan Airways experienced fairly rapid growth. By 1955, the airline had transitioned to Douglas DC-3s. Within two decades of its inception, Malayan Airlines boasted an impressively diverse fleet, including the Douglas DC-4 Skymaster, Vickers Viscount, Lockheed L-1049 Super Constellation, Bristol Britannia, de Havilland Comet 4, and Fokker F27. In a pivotal move in 1960, Malayan Airways





An in-flight menu from the early days



Malaysian Airline System 737-200, similar to that of Flight 653, circa late 1970s

initiated its inaugural 'long-haul' flight to Hong Kong, deploying an 84-seat, four-turboprop Bristol Britannia.

The year 1963 marked the birth of modern-day Malaysia, leading to the rebranding of Malayan Airways to Malaysian Airways. This adjustment better reflected the airline's home base. Simultaneously, Malaysian Airways welcomed five state-of-the-art Fokker F27 Friendships to its fleet.

### BREAKING UP IS (NOT SO) HARD TO DO

The national airline was one more casualty of the historic break between Malaysia and Singapore, but probably not in the way you might think. In 1965, Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia resulted in the renaming of Malaysian Airways to Malaysia-Singapore Airlines – almost the opposite of what would seem logical. This marked a turning point beyond naming conventions, too, as Boeing 707s and 737s were introduced to the airline.

However, two decades after being formed, the airline encountered existential challenges rooted in conflicting interests between the governments of Singapore and Malaysia. Though there were other issues, the most notable was that while Singapore aimed for an expansive international network, Malaysia prioritized domestic routes. Given the split-landmass geography of Malaysia, and the tiny stature of Singapore, neither

side's position was unreasonable – but the difference in priorities was untenable.

This strategic discord led to the airline's dissolution in 1972, giving rise to two distinct entities: Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airline System, colloquially known as MAS. Singapore Airlines inherited the Boeing 707s and 737s, operating primarily from Singapore. Meanwhile, MAS retained the Fokkers, concentrating on domestic routes and selected international services from Kuala Lumpur.

Post-breakup, MAS managed a fleet of 19 aircraft, including jets capable of flying to London. The introduction of DC-10-30 aircraft in 1976 marked a new phase, with MAS flights extending to Amsterdam, Paris, and Frankfurt. Under Malaysian

Government ownership, MAS expanded its reach, aligning with the global trend where emerging nations valued extensive networks and high-profile national carriers.

In December 1977, MAS suffered its first fatal crash, which resulted from a hijacking of Flight 653, a domestic flight from Penang to Kuala Lumpur. The hijackers forced a diversion of the flight to Singapore, but fatally shot the pilot and copilot following the revelation that the plane would run out of fuel before reaching Singapore. The Boeing 737 crashed near Tanjung Kupang in Johor, with the loss of all 93 passengers and seven crew. The motive and identity of the hijacker or hijackers was never determined. A memorial to the lost flight with all the victims' names still stands



As the jet age grew for commercial air travel, so too did MSA





The leadership of Idris Jala as CEO from 2005-2009 marked a transformational time at the airline



Captain Izham Ismail, former CEO of Malaysia Airlines and current Managing Director of Malaysian Aviation Group



Malaysia Airlines 777, similar to two which were lost in 2014



Vintage Malaysian Airways passenger ticket

today in Tanjung Kupang, and the crash remains the deadliest to occur on Malaysian soil.

**TURBULENT TIMES: THE ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS**

By the 1980s, MAS had established routes to 47 overseas destinations, spanning Asia, Europe, and Oceania, with limited ventures into the Americas. Despite exploratory flights to far-off destinations like Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Buenos Aires, the focus remained on Europe and Oceania. However, the airline faced a significant setback during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Sustained financial losses prompted MAS to undertake a substantial transformation programme.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, MAS evolved into a major long-haul carrier. The turbulent financial period, lasting over a decade, witnessed the axing of loss-making long-haul routes. Yet, challenges persisted with escalating salary, airport, and aircraft costs. Notably, rising fuel costs and what some observers generously characterised as 'suboptimal revenue management' posed considerable hurdles.

The shift towards financial stability began towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Under the leadership of CEO Idris Jala, MAS executed a robust business turnaround plan. This involved rationalizing routes, discontinuing unprofitable international flights, and transitioning from a predominantly point-to-point to a hub-and-spoke airline model.

Idris Jala's focus on revenue management proved highly successful, prompting the Malaysian government's interest in his inclusion in the national cabinet following his exit from the airline in 2009. Tengku

Azmil Zahrudin assumed leadership in 2009, coinciding with a significant influx of new aircraft orders, including Boeing 737s, Airbus A330s, and Airbus A380s.

**THE WORST OF TIMES**

The 2010s marked an especially tumultuous period for MAS, which underwent another rebranding (shifting from Malaysian Airline System to Malaysia Airlines), but struggled against the ascent of agile, low-cost carriers. The introduction of the expensive A380s in 2012 added to the challenges, quickly becoming a burdensome element for the legacy carrier. These challenges, coupled with high-profile incidents and a changing aviation landscape, created a perfect storm for the airline.

Notably, two tragic and very high-profile events kept Malaysia Airlines in the headlines for unfortunate reasons. In March 2014, Flight 370, a Boeing 777-200ER, disappeared mysteriously with 239 people on board, leaving no trace even after nearly a decade. Just four months later, MH17, another 777-200ER was struck by a missile over eastern Ukraine and crashed, resulting in the loss of all 298 lives on board. The business side was spiralling, as well, as executive suites at the airline saw a high turnover, and the company faced cultural issues, financial difficulties, and plans to delist. And then Covid hit. The onset of the pandemic in 2020 exacerbated the airline's challenges, putting Malaysia Airlines on the back foot at the beginning of the decade. As the pandemic dragged on and international borders remained closed, times were certainly bleak - not just for Malaysia Airlines, but for all carriers worldwide.

However, recent years have seen signs of recovery, both in the broader industry and specifically for Malaysia's flag carrier. In





A surreal image of a Malaysia Airlines 747-400 taxiing at Sydney's Airport in 2006



A Malaysia Airlines A380 at Heathrow London, 2012

2020, the airline carried approximately 3.9 million passengers, a number that dropped to 1.7 million in 2021 but rebounded by nearly 90% in 2022. During this time, Malaysia Airlines launched and resumed several pre-pandemic routes, bid farewell to its last A380, and signed an MoU for 20 A330neos.

#### TURNING A CORNER

The years following the disastrous loss of two 777 aircraft were marked by significant turmoil inside the company, too. When Captain Izham Ismail, who was eyeing retirement after almost 40 years of service, was appointed CEO in 2017, Malaysia Airlines had just witnessed the exit of its second chief executive in the past two years – ex-Ryanair senior executive Peter Bellew had just left the airline, and former Aer Lingus chief Christoph Mueller had exited in 2016.

To say that Izham took on a significant challenge would be an understatement.

But under his leadership since 2017, Malaysia Airlines made impressive strides towards recovery – albeit with a serious interruption thanks to Covid-19. It wasn't easy, and involved numerous contentious meetings with creditors and board members alike. But six years on, all the hard work looks to be paying off.

Financially, there has been a notable turnaround. The Malaysia Aviation Group reported an operating profit of about \$125 million (RM556 million) last year, a stark improvement from the \$173 million (RM767 million) loss reported in 2021. The revenue tripled compared to the previous year, credited to higher demand post-Covid and strategic improvements across business sectors.

Despite being the national carrier, Malaysia Airlines currently holds the position of the second-largest airline in the country, trailing behind AirAsia in both fleet size and number of passengers carried. With its growing fleet of Boeing

737-800s, Airbus A330s, and A350-900s, however, the airline has a comprehensive network covering 29 domestic and 48 international destinations across 22 countries. It operates as a OneWorld member and, as of this writing, has additional orders for 737-8s and A330neos.

Times are certainly looking up at Malaysia Airlines, and the winds appear to be shifting. While facing stiff competition, the airline has perhaps surprisingly identified India as its largest market in recent times, surpassing Australia and even China. According to reports, this strategic shift is reflected in its robust schedule, operating up to 69 weekly flights to nine Indian routes from November to February, establishing itself as a significant player on the Kuala Lumpur-India service.

Though it's impossible to predict the future for any business, for now, the always-resilient Malaysia Airlines continues to build on its nearly 80-year-old legacy. The airline has a fascinating history, and has objectively done an admirable job of steering itself through a remarkably difficult stretch of years to emerge leaner, more financially stable, and set to write the next chapter in its nearly 80-year history. ■



A350 in Malaysia Airlines 'Negaraku' livery

*Information from Malaysia Airlines, Simple Flying, FlightGlobal, and Mashable SEA contributed to this article.*



# Remarkable Realism



Title: Siri Paka | Medium: Oil on canvas Size: 50 x 57 cm



Title: One Of Those Days Vol.2 | Medium: Oil on canvas | Size: 80 x 182 cm



Title: Seberang Takir | Medium: Oil on canvas | Size: 76 x 106 cm

**B**orn in Kuala Terengganu in 1957, the year of his nation's independence, Nazli bin Hamzah has emerged as a prominent figure in the world of fine arts. His artistic journey, anchored in a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Science Malaysia (USM) in 1999, has been marked by a dedication to realism and *trompe-l'œil* styles, primarily executed through oil and acrylic mediums.

In his works, realism takes centre stage, as Nazli meticulously captures the intricacies of his subjects, breathing life into his canvases with a keen eye for detail. His mastery over oil and acrylic adds a depth to his creations, yielding art that bridges the tangible and the artistic.

*Trompe-l'œil*, another stylistic dimension of his expertise, is an art technique that deceives the eye, creating optical illusions that blur the line between reality and art.





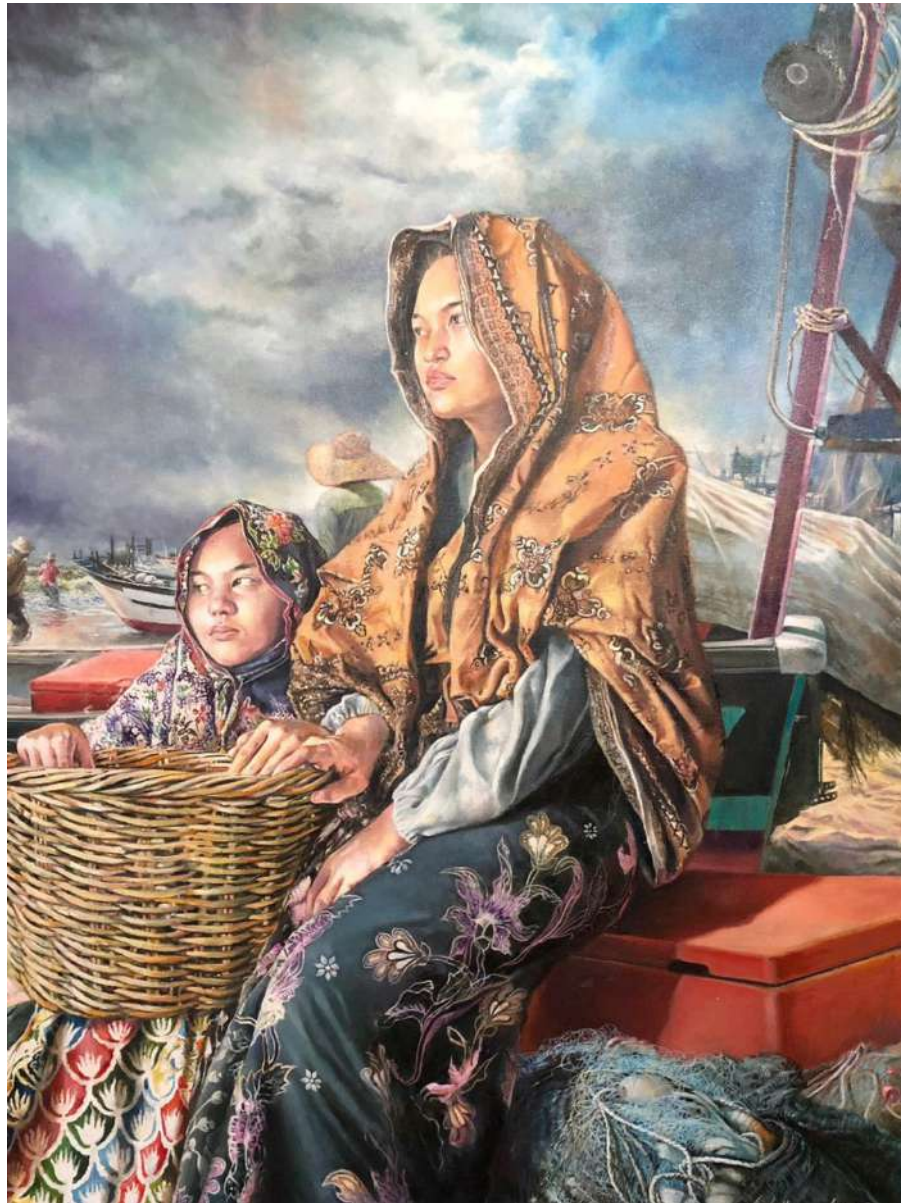
Title: Siri Climbing The Heaven II | Medium: Oil on canvas | Size: 90 x 120cm

(If you've seen 2D artworks that look like realistic, detailed 3D renderings, you've seen *trompe-l'œil*, which is French for "deceive the eye.") Nazli's manipulation of visual perception in this style adds a layer of intrigue to his portfolio, inviting viewers to question what is real and what is illusion within the confines of his art.

Having made his presence known in Malaysia's art scene since 1980, Nazli has actively participated in local and international exhibitions. His art, often a fusion of realism and *trompe-l'œil*, transcends cultural boundaries, making him a distinguished artist with a global footprint.

After retiring as an art lecturer at the Institute of Teacher Education in 2017, Nazli embraced the role of a full-time artist, dedicating himself entirely to his craft. His journey, spanning decades, was recognised by the Terengganu state government in 2018, when they honoured him with the Tokoh Seni Terengganu award.

Nazli bin Hamzah's legacy extends beyond his accolades, encapsulating a commitment to artistic authenticity and an exploration of techniques that challenge the conventional. His artworks not only showcase technical prowess, but



Title: Monsoon Tears | Medium: Oil on canvas | Size: 76 x 106cm



Nazli bin Hamzah

also invite viewers to navigate the delicate interplay between reality and artistic interpretation. ■

Part of The Expat's 'Art Takes Flight' series, which introduces the impressive artworks from a showcase of local artists at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, part of the Love and Support Art program. This innovative program aims to encourage, promote, and support Malaysia's gifted artists, including established, emerging, and disabled artists, by showcasing their artworks, workshops, performances, and more. The proceeds from these sales will be channelled into funding art projects and activities. TEG Media is proud to support this worthwhile effort! To learn more, visit [loveandsupportart.com](http://loveandsupportart.com).



# Restoring Nature, Restoring Wellness



Paddleboats await at Mangala's recreation lake

**W**ith post-pandemic airfares still stubbornly maintaining much-higher-than-2019 prices, it makes sense that some travellers are not including an airplane in at least some of their travel plans. Fortunately, Malaysia is a small enough country – at least the western half of it – to easily facilitate any number of close-to-home getaways. And despite the occasional crazed driver on the highways – perhaps they've seen one too many *Fast and Furious* movies – Malaysia's roads invite exploration by car. But as anyone who's lived here for a few years will tell you, the paths to the Peninsula's usual destinations are well-worn indeed, so if you want something different than Penang, Melaka, Ipoh, or Johor Bahru, swap out the North-South Highway for





Jala Villas at night

the East Coast Highway, and make the short drive to Gambang.

You'd be forgiven if you haven't quite heard of Gambang before. This small, not-quite-coastal town is located along the East Coast Highway, about half an hour before you reach Kuantan, making it just a pleasant two-hour drive from the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur near Gombak. There are a few things to see and do in town – more on that later – but without a doubt, the unrivalled place to stay in this area is Mangala Estate Boutique Resort, a blissful retreat that's less than five minutes off the highway, yet feels miles away from everything. But despite its name – Mangala means 'auspicious' in Sanskrit – this is not just a strikingly beautiful place to stay, it's a resort with a purpose.



An Oriental pied hornbill on the resort grounds

#### FROM FALLOW TO FORESTED

The first impression when you reach the resort, which was previously called Mangala Resort & Spa, is made as you drive through a thick stand of palm trees. It's just a little bit otherworldly for city dwellers, and provides a good sense of what's to come. Once you've parked and walked into the breezy, understated reception lounge, it's hard not to be impressed. It's as if nature and architecture met and fell in love here. Water, forest, and design all converge beautifully in an open, tropical setting, and it's easy to see why Mangala has racked up a number of awards in its relatively short tenure, and is now a Small Luxury Hotels of the World affiliate.

It wasn't always like this, to be sure. The sprawling site on which the lush resort sits now arose like a phoenix from the ashes, with a strong push by the property's owner (in an effort spanning more than 15 years) to rehabilitate and reinvigorate seemingly lifeless, fallow land – disused and left barren from decades of tin mining activities. These days, life has returned to the vast tracts of once-derelict land: forest, lakes, and plantations which serve as home to an eco-minded resort and a veritable cornucopia of thriving animal and plant species. And if it's wellness you seek – a place to relax, rejuvenate, and recentre yourself – Mangala is an ideal destination.

On the grounds of the 62-acre property itself, there's enough to do to keep guests busy, but a lot of them are just as happy to get cosy in their villa and spend much of their time there! We took this to heart

ourselves during a recent visit, as heavy rain persisted on one entire day of our stay. But even that day was enjoyable and memorable, and staying put in the villa was no imposition at all. We had taken up residence in one of the resort's newer Amani Villas, a modern, spacious villa complete with a private lap pool. Other amenities included a separate tub and rainfall shower, a beautifully appointed bathroom, vaulted ceilings, a lovely patio complete with lounge chairs and a ceiling fan, and plenty of surrounding greenery. We also had a large Samsung flat-screen TV, a minibar with complimentary snacks and soft drinks, coffee and tea-making facilities, and strong Wi-Fi throughout.

#### SEE AND DO

A sprawling natural lake is the main centrepiece of Mangala Estate, and some of the villas (Jala Villas) are set on its perimeter – actually on stilts over the water itself – a great choice for those who don't need a private pool and would enjoy the serenity and beauty of the lakefront setting. Even Mangala's gym, nicely kitted out with high-end TechnoGym equipment, boasts floor-to-ceiling windows affording guests a bucolic lake view to savour while they sweat it out. The spacious main resort pool, meanwhile, is a stunning infinity-edge affair extending out from the lake's edge, so even for guests who choose a pool-less villa, nobody really goes without a pool to enjoy here. (There's also a smaller, shallower one for the youngsters!)

Fortunately, the rain didn't last the entire trip, and we were able to get in some exploration of the Mangala grounds.





Lakeside Restaurant

Walking on the paths alongside the big lake was a delight, but curiously enough, one of the more engaging things we did – at least from the perspective of something new – was strolling amid the lush oil palms that dot the landscape. It's a very different experience walking through rows of neatly planted palms than it is to drive by them or fly over them. Though obviously not nearly as diverse as the rainforest that lies adjacent to it, the palm plantation is a big step up from the barren land left behind by years of tin mining and sand mining in the last century. The small patches of palms are interspersed with other plants, trees, and several tracts of wetlands, and strolling amid this much nature is not only scenic, but quite calming, as well.

A smaller lake is used for non-powered watersports like paddle-boating and kayaking, and an archery range is just nearby, as well. We definitely weren't able to avail ourselves of these activities this time, but did manage to enjoy other pursuits. A small fleet of single and tandem bicycles is available, with the whole of the resort available for enjoyable, scenic cycling. They even have Segways and e-scooters if you want a really memorable way to explore.

Birders will be particularly rewarded with a stay here, with dozens of native and migratory bird species calling the Mangala area home, many of which are fairly easy to spot – especially for those with a practiced eye. We were delighted to see a

number of these species, including purple herons, kingfishers, and a trio of oriental pied hornbills playfully cavorting in the trees near the restaurant one morning. The abundance of flora and fauna contributes significantly to the tranquil ambiance of the property, and it was always a delight to see the bright blue flash of a kingfisher or the red plumage of a tiny sunbird.

#### SPA AND DINING

Of course, wellness comes in many forms, and to that end, there is not only that great gym onsite, but a full spa, as well. We feel some of the signature treatments are worth checking out, particularly the Malay and Tungku Herbal massage treatments, but would like to see some more affordably priced options for package deals or couples. We loved the design and beautiful setting of the spa, though, as the treatment rooms are located on the far edge of the lake, affording guests a tranquil and scenic view.

The resort has one restaurant called Lakeside, which as you may have guessed is next to the lake (and the pool). Lakeside is an inviting space, boasting a contemporary design and laid-back vibe, and while we would like to see a more creative, eclectic menu with some additional options for light and healthy dining, the dishes were nicely presented, the staff were friendly, and we liked that Mangala has its own vegetable garden on the property, the bounty of which is used in some of the dishes at Lakeside. A variety of fruits and herbs are also grown



Mangala Spa with lake view





Mangala Estate Boutique Resort

at the resort, a distinct advantage of being located in the tropics on a huge plot of land! (We had visited the gardens earlier and marvelled at how productive the once-impoverished land here has been made – a true transformation!)

When it comes to dining, our thought is that for guests staying several days, it would be advisable to enjoy some meals at the resort, while venturing into Gambang or even Kuantan (about 30 minutes away) at other times. With just one dining outlet onsite and a fairly compact menu, if you're having three meals a day here, it might get a little repetitive. If you, like us, relish the idea of exploring local eateries anyway, making the short drive to Kuantan is an easy choice.

#### BEYOND MANGALA: NEARBY DIVERSIONS

Most guests at Mangala Estate are probably very content to stay put and relax, but if you want to venture out from the resort a bit, there are some worthwhile pursuits in the vicinity. Keep in mind, though, some take a sense of adventure – or a knowledgeable local! Enjoy forest hiking and scenic waterfalls at Hutan Lipur Eco Rimba Jerangkang, about an hour away, or explore the beautiful Kuan Ti Kong Buddhist temple, just 15-20 minutes from the resort. The beautiful Sungai Pandan Waterfall (30 minutes' drive) is a well-known site for locals to visit during the weekends, and if you haven't gotten your fill of nature and greenery at Mangala, the Bukit Sulai



Amani Villa bedroom

Gambang Recreation Park is just 20 minutes away. There's even a small waterpark in Gambang with slides, water rides, and a wave pool, though it probably goes without saying that we didn't check it out personally!

Of course, if you find your way to Kuantan, you can stroll along the beach at popular Teluk Cempedak or along the boardwalk at Taman Esplanade in the city. Apart from that, a visit to their very nice Art Street or the soaring Menara 188 on the banks of the Kuantan River are both a fun way to spend an hour or so before grabbing a bite to eat and then heading back to Mangala Estate.

We thoroughly enjoyed our restorative wellness time at Mangala Estate, and even though they have 65 villas dotting the beautiful landscape, the property is large enough to never feel crowded,

which only contributes more to the sense of serenity. Most of the time, we only saw other guests when we were having our meals at Lakeside Restaurant. Of course, part of that could have been attributed to our one very rainy day!

We were a bit sad to leave, but it was nevertheless remarkable to have indulged in such a sublime, relaxing getaway and quite literally be home and unpacking less than two and a half hours after checking out. It really is a delight to have a proper holiday destination so close to home, and we can't wait to return! ■

**To learn more about the resort, visit [mangalaresortandspa.com](http://mangalaresortandspa.com). If you are interested in visiting Mangala Estate Boutique Resort, we have a limited number of vouchers available at very attractive prices for readers of The Expat. Just drop a line to [anne@tegmmedia.my](mailto:anne@tegmmedia.my).**



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Gleneagles Hospital Kuala Lumpur has delivered exceptional patient care since 1996, ensuring it provides the best care possible to all patients. We take pride in our ability to diagnose and offer treatment for Haematological conditions. Our process adheres to global standards and incorporates both the skill and necessary experience of a diverse team of healthcare disciplines. An accurate diagnosis in treating such conditions helps us pinpoint the most effective treatment plan for each individual patient. Our experienced Specialists can treat different types of benign and malignant Haematological conditions including:

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- Transfusion related issues
- Low white cell count
- Immunodeficiency disorders
- Elevated haemoglobin, platelets or white cells
- Thalassaemia
- Sickle cell disease
- Enlarged spleen
- Myeloproliferative neoplasms

## Malignant Haematological Conditions

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- Multiple myeloma
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- Waldenstroem macroglobulinemia
- Aplastic anaemia

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**Gleneagles Hospital**

KUALA LUMPUR

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# On the Rise: A Community by Women, for Women



**O**n the Rise is more than just a community – it is a vibrant support system dedicated to empowering, enriching, and uplifting women from various professional backgrounds. It provides a space for connection and collaboration in a fun and inclusive environment, with women that are ready to cheer you on!

Founder Kate Sarginson explained the purpose of the community, saying, “We serve as a dynamic platform where women can connect, learn, collaborate, and grow together, fostering a vibrant network of like-minded individuals passionate about building successful and impactful businesses. All this, while having fun and uplifting others along the way!”

## WHAT DOES ON THE RISE DO?

They say it takes a village... On the Rise is your village! With more than 200+ members, On the Rise is a community led by women, for women. On the Rise offers its members opportunities to upskill and advance through a range of curated events, including workshops and

masterclasses, ‘Sip Sessions,’ a Rise Summit centred around female financial empowerment, and a podcast series launching in 2024. Each event encourages social connection and networking in a relaxed and supportive space, whilst also providing opportunities for growth and wisdom exchange.

## HOW IT STARTED...

In September 2022, a small group of friends came together to talk about business over coffee. After walking away feeling incredibly inspired by this moment in time, founder Kate Sarginson formed a Whatsapp group, and within two weeks there were already close to 40 members. As an entrepreneur and seasoned expat in KL, Kate hadn’t found a community that created opportunities for members to share their challenges, explore new ideas and foster meaningful collaborations – particularly in an environment catered for women. Kate knows all too well that entrepreneurship isn’t easy. She recalls feelings of loneliness, stress and overwhelm, and imagined a space that brought together women experiencing the

same thing, to share their challenges and support one another, whilst also having fun along the way.

Now, together with a five-person committee including Franki (Member/Mentor Outreach and Partnerships), Gaya (Community Support), Martine (Programming and Special Projects), Raquel (Social Media), Sarah (Partnerships and Events, and Social Media), On the Rise has 200+ members, hosted 15 events, and has a growth rate of 15+ members per month, mostly through word-of-mouth.

These humble beginnings are at the heart of On the Rise – by lifting each other up, women can achieve more and have a greater impact while maintaining a positive mindset and a healthy lifestyle. On the Rise is your personal cheer squad





– 200 women in your corner, cheering for you every step of the way.

**WHO SHOULD JOIN, AND WHY**  
**Vibrant Network**

On the Rise is a place you come to be inspired, share your story, and find meaningful connections. The community thrives on collaboration, bringing like-minded women together to benefit from the goodness of being a part of something bigger.

**Growth Opportunities**

On the Rise boasts women-designed, community-led events that aim to arm its members with the tools and resources needed to help grow your business and expand your network. Through its Community Directory, On the Rise encourages collaboration between its members, bridging your needs with people in the community and beyond.

**Diverse Membership**

On The Rise members are from various backgrounds and experiences. From life coaches to lawyers, photographers to fashion designers, social media experts and more, On the Rise is an energetic and vibrant mix of social enterprises, product-based businesses, and service industries.

**Zero Registration Fees**

On the Rise offers access to the community with no registration fee applied. A small fee is charged to participate in specific events to cover the costs involved in curating an experience that will be highly valuable, peer-driven advice and support, and worth every second of your time.

**Community Spirit**

On the Rise was created to make your journey more meaningful, impactful, and enjoyable. It believes that true empowerment comes from uplifting one another, offering a helping hand, and celebrating each other's successes.

**Becoming A Member**

As a member of On the Rise, you will have access to a vibrant community of women ready to help you grow and flourish in your entrepreneurial and business journey. Simply visit [ontherisekl.com](http://ontherisekl.com), fill out a short form with your details, and you'll receive a welcome email to your nominated address. You will also be subscribed to a weekly newsletter, keeping you up to date with future events and initiatives. New members are added to the Community Whatsapp group on the last Friday of every month, and there is a Community Directory to help you navigate your way to people who can help you in your business.

Elevate your journey with On the Rise... where together, we rise. ■

**For more information, visit [ontherisekl.com](http://ontherisekl.com) or scan the QR below to visit On the Rise's Instagram page.**



**On the Rise will be hosting a Rise & Thrive event on Wednesday, February 28 at Embody Studio, Plaza Damas. A wellness-focused morning including discussions on women's health, yoga, and sound bath to nurture your mind, body, and spirit. Follow @ontherisekl on Instagram for more details.**





# School Snaps

Malaysia's numerous international schools are regularly abuzz with activities, and we share here just some of the news of their recent events and successes.



## MARY POPPINS TAKES FLIGHT AT GIS: A CELEBRATION OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION

Garden International School's secondary students soared in a practically perfect production of *Mary Poppins*, captivating audiences for three sold-out shows. This wasn't just a musical; it was a vibrant display of the school's commitment to holistic education. Through personalized learning pathways and over 200 co-curricular activities, GIS empowers students to explore their passions beyond academics, nurturing creativity, confidence, and teamwork. *Mary Poppins* was more than a performance; it was the magic of holistic education brought to life, showcasing the well-rounded individuals GIS helps students become.

## CREATING A BETTER WORLD AT ISKL: FROM EMPATHY TO IMPACT

The International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL) hosted a thought-provoking VOX ISKL event titled 'Creating a Better World: From Empathy to Impact,' marking the ninth installment in the VOX ISKL series, a platform specially created to inspire, inform, and ignite conversations both within the school itself and the wider community about topics that matter.

Led by co-director and founder of Inspire Citizens, Aaron Moniz, the meaningful workshop dived into how we move beyond empathy to designing and implementing projects with positive impact and the role parents can play in helping their child/ren contribute to a more sustainable future.

Whether it is a simple everyday task such as showing how to sew on a button or mending a tear through to committing our skills, passion, and competencies to a cause we are interested in – our actions collectively create a school community that becomes a center for impact.

During the workshop, Aaron got the audience to design their own ethical impact project and experience for themselves how our students learn about global citizenship, service, and sustainability.

Watch the VOX ISKL playlist on ISKL's YouTube channel and head on to [iskl.edu.my/community/events/](https://iskl.edu.my/community/events/) to register for the upcoming VOX ISKL workshop with language expert, Dr. Gianfranco Conti!

For more information, please visit [iskl.edu.my](https://iskl.edu.my).





# Ask and Explore at ISKL's Open Day!



**H**ave you ever wondered about the possibilities of an education that nurtures passions in and outside of the classroom?

As one of Malaysia's leading international schools, The International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL) understands the importance of a holistic approach to education, as the school focuses on nurturing the individual instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach. This is because every child learns differently, and ISKL's mission is to provide each learner with the flexibility to choose the pathway best suited to their abilities, interests, and aspirations.

ISKL's purpose as a school is to prepare students for life itself, as it believes in helping students shape their paths, supporting them in discovering their passions, developing their competencies, and having an ethical impact on the world. Alongside ISKL's world-renowned IB Diploma programme and the innovative PRAXIS and Pursuits programs, the values of self-directedness, the ability to think creatively, reason critically, and communicate effectively are important life skills that are integral components of ISKL's learning principles and culture from Early Childhood through to Grade 12.

Visiting a school is one of the essential steps for parents in understanding how their family can fit into the community and how their children can thrive. Echoing this, Christina Decu, ISKL's Director of Enrollment Management, emphasizes the importance of experiencing the school community and environment firsthand.

Christina says, "It is important for parents to visit a school and get a feel of how your family could be part of the community and your children to grow to be their best selves. Here, we don't just enroll students—we enroll families."

ISKL will hold its Open Day this February for families to ask and explore the ISKL approach in preparing their children for the future. It's a great chance to tour the state-of-the-art ISKL campus, hear from the Head of School, Mr. Rami Madani, and meet some key members of our community, from our Students Admission Representatives (STARs) to our Divisional Principals and parents for a Q&A session.

Head to [iskl.edu.my/admissions/iskl-open-day](http://iskl.edu.my/admissions/iskl-open-day) to register for ISKL's Open Day this February. We look forward to sharing what our school has to offer you and your family! ■



## ABOUT ISKL

Established in 1965, The International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL) has become known as a center of excellence in the world of international education. ISKL is a co-educational, private, non-profit school responsible for the learning journey of over 1,600 students aged 3-18 years representing more than 70 nationalities at its campus in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

ISKL offers a robust international curriculum that combines leading North American educational frameworks with global best practices. The curriculum recognizes that students are on a lifelong learning journey and is driven by ISKL's purpose to prepare our students for life itself, as we believe in the importance of helping students to shape their own paths, supporting them in discovering their passions, developing their competencies, and having an ethical impact on the world.

ISKL is accredited internationally through the Council of International Schools (CIS), and in the United States through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). ISKL has a strong focus on service and sustainability across its divisions and is a member of the Eco-Schools organization and the Green Schools Alliance.





# Past Made Present: Penang's Restored Mansions

**P**enang has weathered many phases of history, and as a result features today a hearty blend of fascinating ancestry and contemporary civilisation. Placed with their own stories to tell are mansions which, through their architecture and design, pay subtle tribute to the island's colonial past and multicultural heritage. From a charismatic vision that combines Feng Shui and Western plans to a hotel that has seen five distinct periods of Penang history to the charm of an afternoon tea in Malaysia's only surviving Georgian mansion... keep a keen eye trained on the details and step back in time with a visit to Penang's enduring heritage mansions.

## MACALISTER MANSION

From the looks of the façade, this restored old mansion appears to be straight out of a magazine. Beyond the first impression of the white-washed walls and Victorian window shutters lies a structure originally built in the early 1900s, named after Sir Norman Macalister, a former British Governor of Penang. The lavish design of the rooms blends the use of exclusive marbles like Ice Emerald, Rossa Francia, and Spider Red, with beautiful mosaic



Macalister Mansion



Macalister Mansion



The Edison

tiles, while wooden furniture and a subtle palette of soft whites and greys add more personality. Meanwhile, the trellises, spiral stairs, and even a cannon give visitors an illusion of being in a time warp. Throw the odds in your favour for picking a winning wine in The Cellar, their in-house bar known for having the largest collection of wines in Penang, luring aficionados to pair cheese platters while they swirl and sip.

## THE EDISON

Leith Street was not only one of the oldest streets on the island, but also among the wealthiest, as Hakka tycoons made their home here in the 1890s. The glitzy street lost its lustre by the middle of the 20th century, but that wasn't to be

the end of its story. Today, The Edison Hotel proudly holds the mantle for luxury and beauty following its restoration in 2014. (It's hard to imagine that it was once an administrative hub for the Japanese during World War II.) The 19th-century mansion still has many of its original structures – shuttered windows, grand staircases, an open-air courtyard, marble-clad floors, and Peranakan tiles. For all its yesteryear charms, however, the hotel doesn't skimp on contemporary artistic flair, with a dragon-themed water fountain, modern Scandi design, shady cabanas, and a pool that lures for stargazing with cocktail in hand. Distinctive colours like panels of porcelain blue and rich jade punctuate the character





The Edison



East Indies Mansion

of the space. At The Lounge, a contemporary breakfast spot and communal lounge, you'll find Malaysian childhood snacks like lemon tablets, hawflakes, and *roti kapai* that echo the theme of successfully modernising while still preserving.

#### EAST INDIES MANSION

Stepping foot into this historic Straits Chinese home feels like entering a peaceful oasis. The serene courtyards are undoubtedly its defining features, fringed by potted flowers and wooden chairs that seem to embrace a slow-paced life. Known as the "hearts of the mansion," you will also find traditional statues and ancient trees. Similarly, the rooms are tastefully put together with antique furnishings, period photographs, and preserved original walls. The lighting is mellow, the artifacts speak volumes about their history, and the terracotta tiles give an earthy touch to the space. Get a closer look at hand-hewn kitchen utensils, ceramics, and school desks. Sited at the heart of George Town, walk the length of China Street to discover Little India.

#### YENG KENG HOTEL

Chulia Street's neighbourhood often keeps hopping well past midnight with energy with its mixture of cafes and street food. As you drive down the road, Yeng Keng Hotel catches your attention with a rather tranquil tempo. This building was an Anglo-Indian bungalow in the 1800s; these days, it's been meticulously restored and upgraded with 19 rooms and suites. The Chinese Wu-Dian-roofed entrance, hanging lights, and Chinese characters give the feel of entering a different era. The patio is huge, flanked by well-landscaped botany. On the inside, bright red and yellow colours, gilded frames, floral motifs on walls, and hardwood floors score high on the aesthetic scale. Plants of various shapes and sizes inject a



Yeng Keng Hotel



Yeng Keng Hotel





23 Love Lane

breath of fresh air, allowing the open spaces to blend seamlessly around the property. The hotel's ability to remain as an oasis of solitude amid such a happening area makes it an ideal spot for those seeking the best of both worlds.

**23 LOVE LANE**

Tucked behind a high wall along Love Lane, this boutique hotel manages to speak to five different architectural periods. The white-washed façade, lush greenery, and timeworn collections are just part of a handful of things which make this place unfairly underrated. Historians could easily identify the architectural influences that define the property, particularly in the design of its rooms – indeed, no two rooms are the same. Unique artworks and collectibles often demand your camera's attention, and the mixture of Asian and colonial furniture aids in comfort. The vibrant colours give a refreshing spark to an otherwise vintage space. Take a break and unshackle from your smartphone while relaxing in the small library lounge on the second level or the nicely manicured garden courtyard. Adding to the ambiance of the space, the transition from daylight to night is accompanied by soft lights and a soothing breeze.

**CAMPBELL HOUSE**

While accommodations are a fine way to repurpose an old mansion, it's also



Campbell House

something special to dine in an exquisite and nicely restored space. Campbell House, a three-story Straits Chinese building, is a hotel that also houses a prominent Italian restaurant, Il Bacaro. This establishment was initially a budget hotel for pilgrims waiting for vessels to Mecca and for Hainanese sailors boarding working ships. These influences are traceable with the Indo-Chinese furnishings and vintage decorations. Moving into the restaurant, though, the authentic Italian menu reminds one of the backstreet taverns of Venice. Pizzas and pastas will always delight, but consider skipping the usuals for the Venetian Cicchetti – small plates of food paired with glasses of wine. Lace your palate with varied flavours while checking



Il Bacaro, Campbell House



32 Mansion



32 Mansion Beach Blanket Babylon





The Blue Mansion



The Blue Mansion - chien nien designs on the gables

out all the little details that whisper tales of the past.

### 32 MANSION

For diners who find their way here, the reward is twofold: there is a beachside bar and a classy restaurant all under this Italianate Villa. 32 Mansion was built for a local tin magnate's son who had visited and fallen in love with Italy. Every aspect of the mansion spells grandeur, from the hallways to the chandeliers and the full-length colonial shutter windows. And the feast for the eyes continues as a feast for the palate, too! For lunch, nip into Beach Blanket Babylon, an al-fresco café overlooking the sea, and enjoy the beer-battered fish and chips. Dress up for dinner as it is a classier affair with menu choices such as like crab *laksa lemak*, duck confit with roasted pumpkin, and Black Angus ribeye. With the piano being played in the background, diners will create lasting memories at this mansion.

### SUFFOLK HOUSE

When one thinks of authentic British meals, afternoon tea doubtlessly springs to

mind. There is no better place to experience it than Suffolk House. Touted as the first 'Great House' of Penang, it is located on the Suffolk Estate, which was originally owned by Francis Light until he died in 1794. The house was initially a modest timber and attap structure, with these earlier construction techniques believed to have mirrored those found in the garden houses of Madras, India. Suffolk House is unique, however. As Malaysia's only surviving Georgian Mansion, the current design is a narrative of historical Penang. The high ceilings, extravagant chandeliers, and velvet drapes add to the uplifting atmosphere, while the spacious lawns invite a relaxed stroll to work up an appetite for the aforementioned afternoon tea. A three-tiered tray arrives with a mix of savoury and sweet treats, with the freshly baked apricot scones being a stand-out. These dainty bites come with homemade jams, butter, and cream, ready to be enjoyed with your choice of Ronnefeldt tea.

### THE BLUE MANSION (CHEONG FATT TZE)

During its glory days, the Blue Mansion was held in the highest of regard, as Cheong Fatt Tze aspired to keep his descendants in a home of unrivalled



23 Love Lane



Suffolk House



Suffolk House's apricot scones

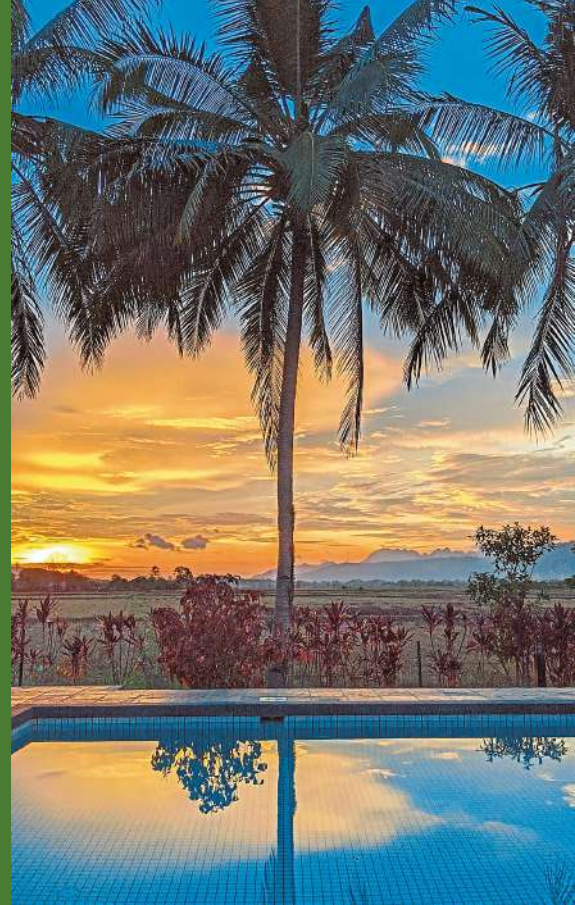
elegance and grandeur. In the era when everyone was turning their attention to Anglo-Indian designs, he took a different path. The eclectic fusion of Eastern architectural styles and cultural Hakka and Teochew influences are evident throughout the building. Think of *chien nien* – a Qing Dynasty craft on porcelain designs, Gothic louvred windows, spiral staircases, art nouveau stained glass, and British encaustic floor tiles. Speaking of Chinese heritage, the entire mansion was constructed with proper Feng Shui as well. This 38-room, 220-window, indigo-coloured mansion was built in the 1880s, but as the decades marched on, fell into disrepair. Fortunately, the mansion was salvaged from decay in the 1990s, with a six-year restoration effort that returned the home to its original glory. Today, staying in the property's boutique hotel may be the best way to discover the mansion, but there's also a mansion tour and two restaurants – Café Mangga and Indigo Restaurant – located onsite. ■





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# It's Greek to Me

BY CHAD MERCHANT

**THE DINING LANDSCAPE** in Greater Kuala Lumpur has improved dramatically over the past decade, with more and more varied options available at a wide range of budgets. Still, of the handful of cuisines that could be considered as underrepresented in the city, there has been perhaps none more so than Greek.

Deeply rooted in the Mediterranean, Greek cuisine is characterised by fundamental ingredients that define its robust flavours. Olive oil, a cornerstone, imparts a rich and fruity essence to dishes. Feta cheese, crumbly and tangy, is ubiquitous, while various types of olives add briny depth. Fresh vegetables like tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, and zucchinis shine, complemented by a medley of herbs and spices such as oregano, mint, and thyme. Lamb and beef play an undeniable role, while seafood, a coastal delicacy of Greece, also features. Lemon adds a fresh zing, grains like bulgur and rice are used, thin sheets of filo pastry are a key component of several notable dishes, and honey and nuts sweeten desserts, offering a taste journey that reflects the simplicity and authenticity of Greek culinary traditions.

But taking this journey has always proven to be a challenge in Malaysia. But with the opening of Mazi Greek Taverna a few short months ago, that's all changed. With its bucolic garden setting on the 'backyard side' of The Stories at Taman Tunku, Mazi serves up destination dining in KL that's worthy of this marvellous cuisine.

And we have to say, a visit to Mazi might just be worth it for their homemade pita bread alone. Made with extra virgin

olive oil and served warm and fresh, it was a revelation – and highly enjoyable with Mazi's range of spreads and dips (RM8 to RM10), including hummus, tzatziki, and *melitzanosalata*. You'll be forgiven if you take your time pronouncing that last one, but though it's hard to say, it's easy to eat – a smoky roasted eggplant purée lashed with lemon, garlic, and olive oil.

Also making the journey worthwhile is Mazi's showstopping *spanakopita* (RM18), with stunningly crisp layers of filo filled with spinach, feta, cream cheese, spring onion, and dill. Absolutely incredible when eaten warm, and a must-have dish here.

There are also salads and pastas with Greek flair, and the *revithosalata* (RM28) earned high praise at our table. Comprising chickpeas, roasted red capsicum, feta, sundried tomatoes, lemon, spring onions, and a subtle addition of mint, this salad was delicious – and certainly healthy!

Grilled meats are a delight in Greece, and we'd gladly steer guests towards the 300-g lamb *kleftiko* (RM95), slow-cooked for 12 hours and served with roasted potatoes and tomatoes, or the 200-g MB5 petite Wagyu tenderloin (RM110), accompanied by fresh tzatziki and roasted baby potatoes.

We couldn't resist trying the *moussaka* (RM40), a staple of Greek cooking. A dish full of roasted eggplant, potatoes, minced beef, béchamel, and finely chopped tomatoes, all under a baked canopy of mozzarella cheese – it was every bit as delicious as it sounds! You won't go wrong with the mixed beef and lamb kebabs (RM52), either!

Other menu items include a range of

seafood dishes, but we only tried one, the delightfully named *oktapodi* (RM92), which is – as you may have guessed – an octopus dish. Grilled Spanish octopus with crunchy potatoes, chickpeas, cucumber, and cherry tomatoes, drizzled with olive oil and showered with herbs... another winner at Mazi.

But we were asked early on to save room for dessert, and are we ever glad we did. While the Greek orange pie (RM20) was very nice, we confess it was the *galaktoboureko* (RM20) that absolutely ensnared us. Semolina custard and a delicately crispy filo pastry served hot with a dollop of ice cream, providing not only that lovely temperature contrast, but a textural interplay that was pretty close to perfect.

Mazi offers an excellent range of well-curated wines and cocktails, while teetotallers will enjoy the cold-pressed juices, teas, and soft drinks. ■

## Location & Details

### Mazi Greek Taverna

Unit A1 Taman Tunku, Off Jln Langgak Tunku  
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# Wines in Harmony with Nature



Malbec flourishes in Argentina's Mendoza region



Chickens help control insects in the Chakana vineyards

**ALONG WITH DEATH** and taxes, another of life's great certainties is change. Nothing stays the same, and so it is with winemaking. Winemakers around the world are pushing the envelope and tweaking their blends to create more marketable products.

Over the past few years, new wine styles have appeared, with some of the standout trends being organic, biodynamic, natural, and orange wines. There is a lot of hype, spin, and fascination with such wines because many consider them different, and they want to stand out from the crowd by drinking them.

Several large wine companies and estates around the world now claim organic status. These include Lapostolle (Chile), Distell (South Africa), Domaine Leflaive (Burgundy), Concho y Toro (Chile), Albert Bichot (Burgundy), Cullen Wines (Margaret River), Chapoutier (Rhône), Emilana (Chile), Hither & Yon (McLaren Vale), Lawson's Dry Hills (Marlborough), and Cono Sur (Chile).

Reams have been written on all these styles, so we thought it time to dust the cobwebs off a few barrels of wine to discover what all the fuss is about, firstly with organic wines. The opportunity arose when we noticed

a range of Argentinean wines on our wine merchant's shelves. Chakana is an organic wine producer from the country's acclaimed Mendoza region, and the estate also benefits from engaging a consultant in biodynamic viticulture.

Once the domain of alternative lifestyleers, organic produce has become quite mainstream, and it's not surprising that many grape growers are using fewer chemicals as more and more

consumers demand healthier and more environmentally friendly products.

Organic certification differs from region to region around the world, but there are commonalities, such as no insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, or systematic fungicides. Artificial fertilisers, holistic sustainable viticulture, and less sulphur dioxide as a wine preservative are typical features of these wines. It also means reducing, reusing, recycling,



The Chakana vineyards are scenically located with the Andes as a backdrop





Organic and biodynamic farmers work with nature rather than chemicals

and repurposing at every stage of the winemaking process.

At the end of the day, we still believe that most consumers will judge a wine by its taste; the fact that it's organic is merely another dimension that will come into play for those who are trying to lower their environmental impacts. Here are three Chakana wines that pass muster on the palate and for their winemakers, who work with nature rather than attempt to control it. Many of the estate's wines have also impressed wine advocate Robert Parker, who has rated some as high as 94 points.

#### A MALBEC PRIMER

Two of the three wines tasted here are Malbecs, and it's a variety that we feel deserves a bit of an introduction. Though the variety is grown worldwide, it's safe to say Argentina has taken *de facto* ownership of Malbec, which is a big, bold red grape variety that nevertheless retains an ease of drinkability and has captured the attention of global wine consumers. It's a variety that is native to Cahors in southwest France, but as it fell out of favour with the French a few decades back following a frost-induced loss of some 75% of the entire

crop in 1956, the Argentineans seized the opportunity and subsequently mastered the variety.

Malbec grown in Argentina has smaller berries in tighter clusters than its French counterpart, and whereas French Malbec tends to be on the more sharply tannic side, Malbec grown and produced in Argentina possesses plush tannins that are more rounded and approachable, a characteristic that has doubtlessly led to its remarkable growth in popularity.

Though France still grows the Malbec grape - it's indeed one of the six varieties permitted (though now seldom used) in red Bordeaux wines - these days Malbec is largely celebrated as an Argentine wine variety.

#### ESTATE SELECTION MALBEC

The Chakana Estate Selection is a line of wines from the best sites in the Uco Valley. The selection is based on traditional strains that find their best expression at several locations, including Luján de Cuyo. This rich and bold Malbec is produced from fruit sourced from an altitude of some 1,000 m above sea level, with the Andes Mountains



Many winemakers use a rose bush as an indicator for pests in vineyards





Chakana Estate Selection Malbec



Chakana Ayni Malbec

forming a spectacular backdrop. Grapes are grown in shallow, chalky soils, and a mild climate provides the ideal terroir for producing a fine, approachable Malbec. We love the richness, boldness, and spiciness of this wine, which is dominated by dark berry fruitiness. There is smoothness to the tannins as a result of 12 months of aging in oak. This is an uncomplicated wine that has been made to drink young, and it offers good value for money. This food-loving wine would be welcome at any barbecue, but also pairs competently with some Asian dishes such as beef rendang, beef satay, and grilled chicken wings. It should be served at 12-15°C, which in Malaysia means a little chilling before serving.

**Producer:** Chakana  
**Style:** Estate Selection Malbec  
**Region:** Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza  
**Vintage:** 2020  
**Grape Varieties:** Malbec  
**Alcohol Content:** 14%  
**Closure:** Cork  
**Price:** RM127

**CHAKANA AYNI MALBEC**

Ayni Estate is located at Paraje Altamira, Valle de Uco, Mendoza, about 1,100 m above sea level, on land that had previously been uncultivated. The 36-hectare estate is new, having only been planted out in 2007 on sandy loam and calcareous soil. Malbec grapes thrive here alongside Chardonnay,

Pinot Noir, Garnacha, Cabernet Franc, and Monastrell (also Mataro and Mourvèdre). In its Andean setting, birds and foxes coexist, while minimalist changes have been made to the estate's floristic diversity. This ensures organic certification for wines under the Ayni range. A philosophy of 'in order to receive, you must give first', prevails with viticulturists who nurture and give back to nature in order to reap the fruits of the harvest.

During cool March mornings, the Malbec grapes are manually harvested and destemmed before being placed in concrete tanks. Here, they begin to ferment spontaneously due to indigenous yeasts in the grape bunches. The juice is then aged for at least 12 months in either 5,000-litre untoasted German oak barrels or new and used 500-litre barrels. Winemaker Gabriel Bloise then blends these before the wine is bottle-aged. To ensure the wine maintains its organic and vegan status, it isn't clarified to remove fine suspended materials. This ensures the wine maintains an intense colour and flavour profile. It is purple-red and has aromas that express complex and elegant black fruit characteristics. We detected currant, chocolate, and peppery spice. It offers a balance between natural acidity and fruitiness. This Malbec, produced from a single site, will appeal to those who enjoy full-bodied reds to accompany spicy dishes and steak with a high marbled content, such as Wagyu beef.

**Producer:** Chakana  
**Style:** Ayni Malbec  
**Region:** Uco Valley  
**Vintage:** 2019  
**Grape Varieties:** Malbec  
**Alcohol Content:** 13.5%  
**Closure:** Cork  
**Price:** RM212

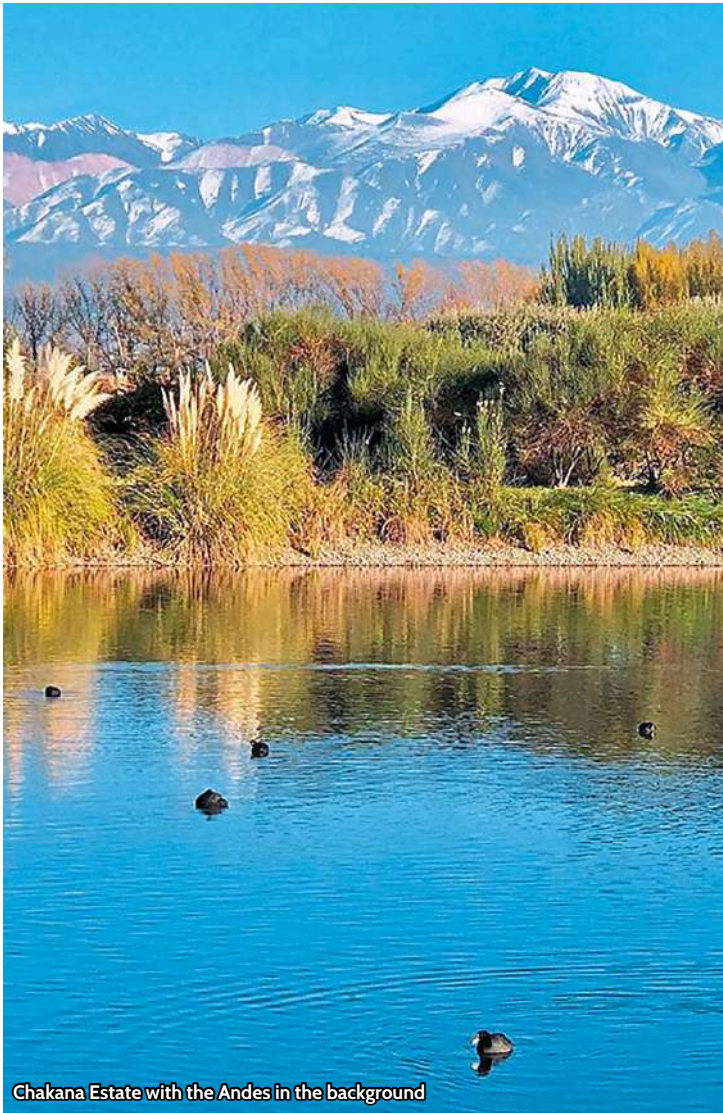
**CHAKANA ATORRANTE TORRONTÉS**

*Atorrante* is local slang for a trickster, and the term is also associated with the tango culture. It is also used to describe the quintessential *porteños*, or inhabitants, of Buenos Aires. The good folk at Chakana suggest this Torrontés wine is similarly approachable, seductive, and emblematic of the true flavours of Argentina. Make of that what you will. It offers a voluptuous aroma of tropical fruit such as lychee and pineapple, and this flows through to the palate. While mostly dry, there is a hint of sweetness, but this is balanced by the wine's natural acidity. While a suitable wine to drink as an aperitif, its obvious food pairing is with fish and seafood.



Chakana is an organic wine producer from the country's acclaimed Mendoza region





Chakana Estate with the Andes in the background



Chakana produces a range of natural wines under the Sobrenatural label

However, we enjoyed it with some mid-level spicy Thai dishes that were all the better for this pairing. As a general guide, you should enjoy this wine if you like the combination of flavours and aroma found in a Gewürztraminer wine. Chakana

Torrontés is Argentina's own white grape variety and a wine for drinking young, so head to your favourite restaurant, bar, or Jaya Grocer to see if it is listed or stocked.



Chakana Estate Atorrante Torrontés

**Producer:** Chakana  
**Style:** Atorrante Torrontés  
**Region:** Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza  
**Vintage:** 2021  
**Grape Varieties:** Torrontés  
**Alcohol Content:** 12.5%  
**Closure:** Screwcap  
**Price:** RM97

So having tasted these wines, and others in this category, the question remains: do organic wines taste any better than wines produced from conventional farming, and can you detect any organic qualities on the palate? The jury is still out on this, with many arguing that being organic doesn't mean much to the average consumer. Others claim a purer wine with intense flavours mostly because they are produced from vines grown without synthetic chemicals. This usually means lower yields and, therefore, more concentrated flavours. However, if you're



Sound organic farming techniques at Chakana ensure healthy vine growth

one who tries to see the world through green-coloured glasses, you be the judge and try one of the above wines. ■



# Declutter Your Home for Chinese New Year!

**P**art of the tradition for Chinese New Year is a good, thorough house-cleaning! Chinese customs and superstition dictate that homes be clean before the start of the new year, sweeping the house free of all the bad luck and misfortune of the past, and opening up spaces for all the new, good luck to enter and infuse your life. In Mandarin, this deep clean is referred to as 扫年 (*sǎo nián*) and literally means to “sweep away the year,” but extends beyond just cleaning to repairing or discarding broken items, finishing home projects, and decluttering the home.

Even if you're not Chinese, this is a pretty good annual habit to get into, so with that in mind, here are some good tips for getting your house in tip-top shape for the Year of the Dragon!

## CLOTHES AND SHOES THAT DON'T FIT ANYMORE

The lead-up to CNY is a great time to dig through your closet and toss any garments that don't fit you – or your style – anymore. Fill up a few bins, and take them to a nearby shelter or other nonprofit to pass along to someone else who can actually use them.

## EXPIRED FOOD FROM THE PANTRY

Dig through the cupboards and get rid of everything that's more than six months past its expiration date, along with any suspect canned goods that are dented or bulging. This is also a good time to toss all those half-empty containers of pasta and other lingering odds and ends that probably won't ever get used.

## UNUSED KITCHEN GADGETS AND COOKWARE

If you haven't used that panini maker in years and can't remember the last time you whipped out the waffle iron, donate those appliances to a resale shop, or offer them up in a neighbourhood chat group if



you're lucky enough to live where such a group exists!

## RATTY OLD TOWELS AND BED LINENS

If you've got a few towels or sheets that look a bit shabby, it's time to take them out of the linen closet. Instead of tossing them, though, repurpose them or consider donating them to a local animal rescue or shelter – towels and blankets are always in high demand there.

## THE JUNK DRAWER

Every household seems to have one of these! The junk drawer can be a seriously terrifying place, but you've got to de-clutter it at least once a year. Toss anything that you can't remember the last time you used it, and consider adding dividers or baskets to keep things more organized.

## ALL THOSE CONDIMENTS STASHED IN YOUR KITCHEN

From mustard to jam to white wine vinegar, many of us have kitchens absolutely packed with condiments. Clean out your fridge and remove any condiments that are old, almost empty, or just don't get eaten, and don't forget to do the same in the pantry.

## STUFF THAT'S BEEN LINGERING IN YOUR FREEZER

Much like the pantry, the freezer can

hide a slew of food that you'll never actually cook. Dig through and find anything that's freezer-burned, unidentifiable, or otherwise unappealing, and toss it in the trash. It might feel weird to waste food, but you wouldn't eat those two-year-old, freezer-burned lamb chops anyway.

## OLD PHONE CHARGERS AND OTHER EXTRANEIOUS CORDS

It seems like every household has a slew of old phone chargers, cables, and cords that they never actually use. Round up all the cords in your home and recycle them at an electronics store in your area – or ask them to recommend a place where you can take them for proper disposal.

With a decluttered house, you can put on the finishing touches with a thorough dusting, sweeping, and mopping – even cleaning curtains and upholstery if you're feeling super-motivated – and when the new lunar year arrives on February 10th, you'll be sitting pretty in a house that's cleaner and more organized than it's been in months!

Remember though, to be truly in line with Chinese traditions, be sure not to sweep your newly cleaned floors or take out the trash for the first few days of the lunar new year – after all, you don't want to sweep away all your fresh new luck! ■

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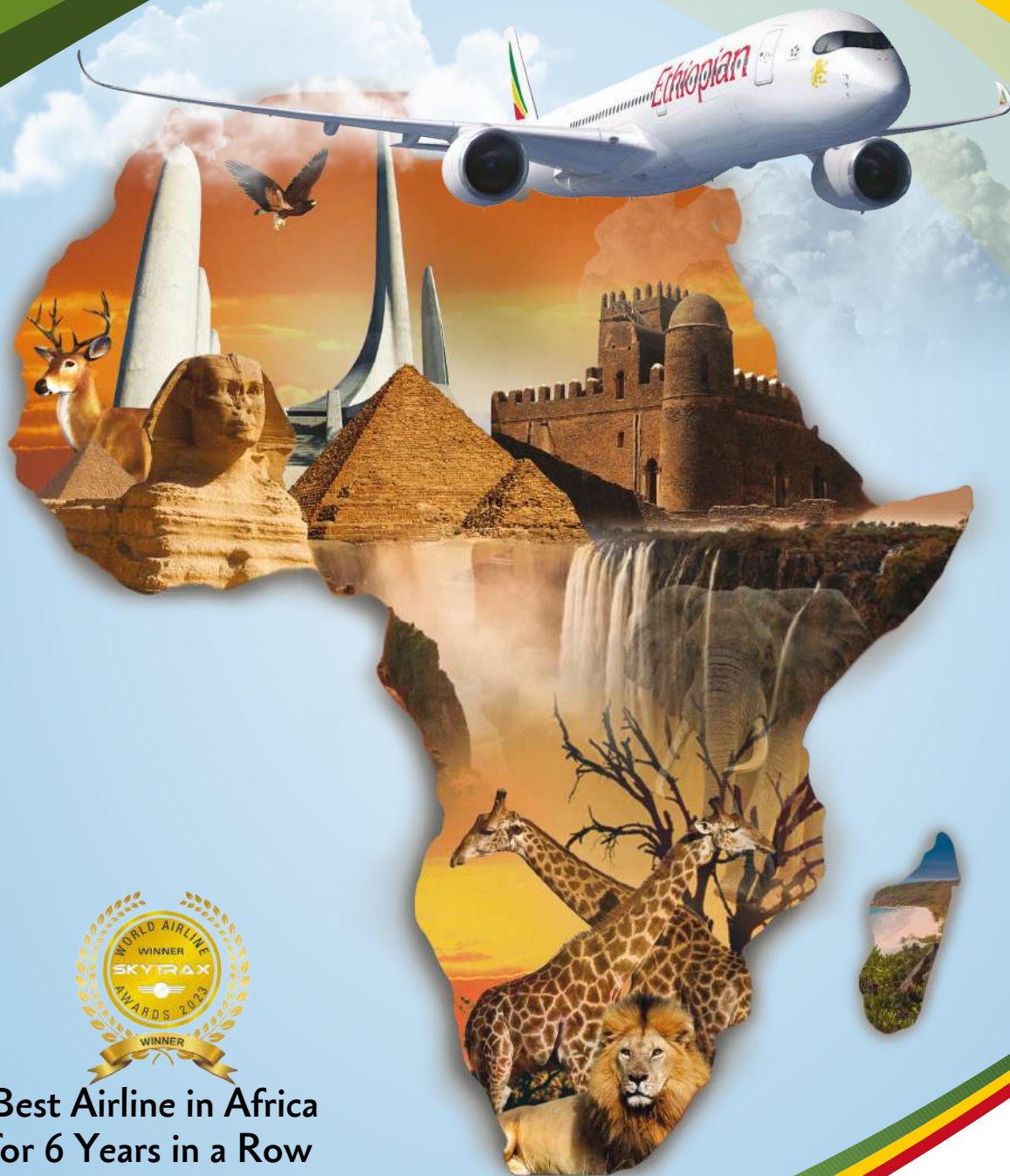


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