

NATURE BECKONS IN KUALA SELANGOR

The birthplace of Selangor is synonymous with history, seafood and fireflies. The natural splendour — mangrove forests teeming with bird and marine life, meandering rivers, and a gigantic sandbar in the Straits of Malacca — as well as the rustic fishing communities make Kuala Selangor well worth a visit.

Text & photos by Sreerema Banoo



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FUN LIFE



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Alighting from the tram at the summit of Bukit Melawati, one is greeted by a friendly and spirited, if not a little rowdy, welcoming committee — as silver leaf monkeys and long-tailed macaques by the dozens pounce on the roof of the tram and gather around visitors hoping for some bananas or food.

They are a hit with most visitors. But do not worry if feeding monkeys is not your cup of tea, the monkeys here are not aggressive and will simply give you the cold shoulder if you do not have any edibles on you, because Bukit Melawati should be visited for more than just man's furry cousins.

Overlooking the Straits of Malacca, Bukit Melawati is about 70km from Kuala Lumpur in Kuala Selangor. It was the administrative centre and stronghold of the Selangor sultanate in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, before the state capital was moved to Jugra and later Klang. Developed during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim, the state's second ruler, initially as a recreation spot, Bukit Melawati was the scene of many battles.

The story of Bukit Melawati's founding and its place in Kuala Selangor's history is told in detail at the Kuala Selangor Historical Museum, located on the hill. A heavily fortified fort once stood on the summit of the hill and was used in the fight against the Dutch when Selangor was sucked into the struggle between the Dutch and the rulers of Johor and Riau. The fort fell to the Dutch in 1784, and was renamed Altingsburg Fort, after the Dutch governor-general. But a year later, Sultan Ibrahim recaptured the fort in a daring night attack, with the help of warriors from Pahang and mercenaries from Permatang. It was a significant victory because it was the first time a local sultan was able to retake a fort from a foreign power.

The ramparts of the fort can still be seen, along with the palace grounds, royal graves, a flat stone used for beheading offenders, the Poisoned Well,



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01. Sunset on the river

02. Visitors can go up the hill using private vehicles on weekdays while a tram service is provided on weekends for those who do not want to scale it on foot

03. Monkeys are afraid of tigers, even toy ones



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- 04. A walk around picturesque Bukit Melawati
- 05. The Poisoned Well at Bukit Melawati was used to torture and kill enemies
- 06. The lighthouse at Bukit Melawati
- 07. Villages on the river
- 08. Dried seafood in Kuala Selangor
- 09. Lala or clams cooked in rice wine makes for an addictive snack
- 10. One of the many delights of Kuala Selangor, fresh and delicious seafood

several cannons directed at the mouth of the Selangor River and, most impressive of all, the Kuala Selangor Lighthouse (also known as the Altingsburg Lighthouse), which was built in 1907.

According to museum assistant Mahadi, who regaled us with many a story of Bukit Melawati's past, the lighthouse was built close to the shore, as lighthouses ought to be, but receding water levels and forests that have sprung up on what was once the seabed have "pushed" this white tower inland.

Long before the development of Bukit Melawati, Kuala Selangor was settled by seafaring people and fishermen around the Selangor River. Kuala Selangor's history is intertwined with the history of the state. It is here in Kuala Selangor district that you will find the oldest settlement in Selangor — Jeram. According to the Malay Annals, Sultan Mansor Shah of Melaka is said to have installed his prince Paduka Seri Cina in Jeram, a port at the time.



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FUN LIFE AT KUALA SELANGOR

Pasir Penambang
Kuala Selangor
(014) 337 8310

www.facebook.com/funlifeatkualaselangor

Opens daily from 7am to 9.30pm

This family operation was started by Ng Hock Lye in 2017. Born and bred in Kuala Selangor, Ng used to harvest cockles for a living before going into the travel business. Together with his sons Eric and Derek, Fun Life offers tours to Sky Mirror as well as eagle feeding and firefly watching tours. Prices start from RM15.

Up until the early 18th century, Selangor was a vassal state of Johor. The Bugis had assumed full control over Selangor and their ruler was called the Yamtuan of Selangor. The Bugis' hold over Selangor was further consolidated when the brotherhood of the five Bugis rajas defeated Raja Kecil Siak. The highlight of the Bugis campaign in Selangor was achieved on Dec 1, 1766, when Raja Lumu became the ruler of Selangor and adopted the name Sultan Sallehuddin. He governed the state from Kuala Selangor, as did his successors Sultan Ibrahim and Sultan Muhammad, but during the latter's reign the state capital was moved to Jugra in 1827.

ON THE RIVER

Unlike many older towns in Selangor, Kuala Selangor does not have a distinctive colonial appearance, probably due to the town's development in recent decades. In the so-called old town, at the foot of Bukit Melawati, there are a few rows of shophouses that date back to the colonial era, but some of these properties have been renovated.

Across the river from the old town of Kuala Selangor lies Pasir Penambang, and it is here that many visitors flock to in order to buy fresh or dried seafood or to go on a sea or river escapade. Today, it is just a quick drive across the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Bridge but before the bridge was built in 1979, the only way to cross to the other side was by ferry.

At Pasir Penambang, there are many seafood restaurants and boat operators offering a variety of tours, including eagle feeding tours in the late evening. Boats take visitors out to the estuary and with some incentive — chicken skin or chicken fat thrown into the water — within seconds the river is



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11. An old school eatery at Pasir Penambang

12. The tasty delights of Restoran Sin Hong Kee



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RESTORAN SIN HONG KEE

57 Jalan Pasir Penambang

Kuala Selangor

Opens 5pm to 12pm, daily

This is an old-school eatery that is often overlooked by visitors in favour of the larger, flashier seafood restaurants. The must-try dishes are the fried pork ribs, and prawns wrapped in yam paste.



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teeming with birds such as the brahminy kite and seagulls.

In fact, because of the regularity of these feeding tours, the birds have been conditioned to expect food and you can spot flocks of them hovering over and near the approaching boats, dotting the horizon like a scene from a Hitchcock movie. Once the chicken fat hits the water, it's mayhem as the birds swoop down, dipping in and out of the water.

Although the feeding session lasts only



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**KAMPUNG KUANTAN
FIREFLIES PARK**

Kampung Kuantan

Opens from 7.30pm to 10.30pm, daily

Visitors are ferried via sampan (four to a boat, RM50 per sampan) to get up close to the fireflies that are found in the berembang trees all along the mangrove forest. The best time to visit is on moonless nights or just after the rain as the lights are said to be brighter.

- 13. Eagle feeding on the river
- 14. Taman Alam was set up in 1987 by the Malaysian Nature Society and the Selangor government
- 15. One of the trails at Taman Alam
- 16. Kampung Kuantan Fireflies Park
- 17. Taman Alam plays an important role in conservation
- 18. Birdlife of Kuala Selangor
- 19. A balitong snail from the mangroves
- 20. One of the many crab species found in the mangroves
- 21. The mangroves are an integral part of the coastal ecosystem



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a few minutes, the boat ride is enjoyable. Apart from a beautiful view of the sunset, the pace is gentle and as the boat cruises around the estuary you will see egrets and herons that have returned home for the night perched on the trees.

Firefly tours from Pasir Penambang are a recent offering, and unlike the sampans that cruise soundlessly at the Kampung Kuantan Firefly Park, the tours use motorised boats so they do not go up close to the trees where the insects congregate. Still, it is worth a visit and can easily be paired with the eagle feeding tour.

Another increasingly popular tour takes visitors to a sandbar in the Straits of Malacca. Called the Sky Mirror for its mirror-like reflection of the sky in the pools of water, the sandbar is accessible only a few times a month. (See story on Page 112.)

MANGROVE APPRECIATION

If you are a landlubber and nature lover, then the mangrove forest around Kuala Selangor is a must-visit. One of the best places to appreciate this ecosystem, crucial to the health of rivers, coastal waters and the fishing industry, is the Kuala Selangor Nature Park, or Taman Alam.

Located at the foot of Bukit Melawati, the nature park was set up in 1987 by the Malaysian Nature Society and the Selangor government. Spanning some 800 acres, the park is made up of secondary forest, the estuary of the Selangor River, mangrove forests, mudflats and a man-made 25-acre brackish water lake system.

The park is home to a variety of animal life, including mud lobsters, mudskippers, silver leaf monkeys, otters, and local and migratory birds.



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Steve Lee, the owner of Wave Rest House & Café in Kampung Sungai Janggut in nearby Jeram, says this is one of his favourite places in Kuala Selangor to take visitors to. “It’s so close to Bukit Melawati, yet people hardly come here.”

His favourite part of the park is the mangrove walkway, which is about an hour’s walk round-trip from the car park. Here you will find many types of crabs, including blue and orange ones that are just the size of your thumbnail. The walk also takes you to the mudflats where you can catch a glimpse of the Straits of Malacca.

Lee, whose father has been a fisherman for more than four decades, understands the importance of preserving the mangrove forests. Not only are these forests a diversity hot spot, they are also vital for healthy fisheries — their network of roots and the surrounding vegetation trap and filter sediments. But in recent years, the mangrove forests in Kuala Selangor have taken a beating. The one near Lee’s guesthouse, for example has been battered by storms and floods and in places it has retreated by about 1km, according to a Jabatan Perhutanan officer who was coordinating a tree-planting project hosted by Lee.

The corporate social responsibility project by an oil and gas services company, which took place in April, was one of a few hosted by Lee over the years in a bid to rejuvenate the mangroves near his home and guesthouse.

BEING A PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Meeting people like Lee, who are passionate about their hometowns and villages, is



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- 22. The mangrove forests around Kuala Selangor have been destroyed by strong waves
- 23. Wave Rest House in Kampung Sungai Janggut
- 24. Price list for Kedai Roti Yong Kee
- 25. Hot from the oven

WAVE REST HOUSE & CAFÉ

Jalan Bagan Sungai Janggut
Batu 15, Jeram
Kampung Sungai Janggut
(017) 716 4386 (Steve Lee) (012) 322 9622 (Julie Yap)
www.huijiavoyage.com/wave-rest-house-cafe

This family business was started by Steve Lee in 2014 on the family’s property by the river’s edge. A seasoned fisherman, it was Lee’s father who first discovered the sandbar that is now Kuala Selangor’s hottest tourist attraction. Apart from day trips to Sky Mirror, that depart from the property’s private jetty, it is well worth staying the night to go on a birdwatching tour along the river and to walk to the nearby mangrove forest to get up close and personal with little crustaceans. Besides Lee’s knowledge of the coastal and marine life, visitors to this guesthouse will also be spoilt by his mother’s fabulous cooking. (Until Nov 30, the guesthouse is offering a promotional tour to Sky Mirror — RM85 per person, which includes a set meal).



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KEDAI ROTI YONG KEE

105 Jalan Sasaran, Sasaran
Jeram
Opens from 9am to 7pm, daily except Sunday
Proprietor Chu Hin Beng has been baking for 44 years, and the business itself was started by his father 22 years before that. Chu now runs the business, baking fresh loaves and buns daily with his brother and daughter-in-law. Apart from regulars and drop-ins, Chu also supplies his baked goods to factory canteens.



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TODDY AND CURRY

Batu 17 Jalan Sungai Sembilang
Jeram
Opens from 10am to 6pm, daily

Nestled beside an oil palm estate, within a grove of coconut trees, this unassuming toddy shack is popular with locals and visitors. The must-try is the chicken and wild boar paratel, and, on request, the cook will also whip up scrambled eggs with shallots and cili padi — all of which pair perfectly with the sweet toddy. Contrary to popular belief you cannot get drunk on toddy; keep it for about two hours and it just becomes mildly intoxicating.



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- 26. Freshly baked buns ready to be filled
- 27. Chu Hin Beng has been a baker for more than 40 years
- 28. Fresh toddy and tasty bites
- 29. Finger-licking good, wild boar curry
- 30. The toddy stored in jars

another highlight of a visit to Kuala Selangor. The district is dotted with little towns and communities, each with its own unique character.

Day trippers to Kuala Selangor often overlook these small settlements, but it is here that you will find yummy, pillowy soft breads, baked fresh daily, as has been the practice for four decades. It is also here, nestled in an oil palm estate, that you can tuck into finger-licking curries of wild boar and monitor lizard, washed down with refreshing, sweet toddy or palm nectar. And that is your afternoon sorted. The ambience may get a rating of zero, but the eats are easily a 10.



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And it is around these villages that you will hear stories of life “in those days”. Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng in Kampung Sungai Janggut, a nondescript, wooden coffee shop on the main road from Kapar to Kuala Selangor, might not attract the attention of a visitor, but it is here that you will see how a multiracial community lives quite happily together.

People of all races pop by the shop for a packet of RM3 chicken rice or a cup of coffee made by the boss, known only as Ah Pong. The 70-year-old has been making coffee since he was 12 years old, and has seen village boys grow up and leave the village — returning only during Chinese New Year to play mah-jong in his coffee shop until the wee hours.

Once the meeting place for the village, Ah Pong’s shop was also its post box. Back when the homes did not have proper addresses, the postman would leave the villagers’ mail at Ah Pong’s shop. “Sometimes we would find mail that has been there for years!” says Lee.

And it is in the villages where you meet lively characters, passionate about introducing their home to visitors. Jackson Chai, the owner of the charming Ah Jia House in Sasaran’s fishing village, is one such person. His guesthouse, once the home of his grandmother, is almost 50 years old, and it has been lovingly and carefully restored.

Furnished with black-and-white photos



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- 31. A mah-jong corner at Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng
- 32. Old-school vibe at Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng
- 33. Chicken rice for RM3 is one of the best sellers at Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng
- 34. Long before there were proper addresses for the homes in the village of Sungai Janggut, Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng was where villagers would come to check if they had mail
- 35. Kedai Kopi Chop Hup Heng’s proprietor Ah Pong



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36. Welcome to Ah Jia House, a homestay in Sasaran

37. & 38. Ah Jia House’s retro interior is a throwback to the 1960s

39. Ah Jia House has been welcoming guests since 2017



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AH JIA HOUSE

46 Bagan Sasaran
Jeram

(016) 205 6283 (Jackson Chai)

www.facebook.com/ahjiahouse

A relatively new guesthouse, Jackson Chai’s place is ideal for families. One of the activities on offer at Ah Jia House is cycling to a nearby field to harvest lemongrass, which he then distills into mosquito repellent. He also offers arts and crafts activities such as painting on shells and, if you are in luck, you may even be able to do a spot of crab catching, not for the dinner table but for a crab race. The crustaceans are then released back into the river.



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KEDAI KOPI SHIN LOK

1 Batu 17 Sungai Sembilang
Jalan Kenari 1, Taman Kenari,
Jeram
(03) 3264 7591

Opens from 7am to 5pm

Famous for its steamed buns (pao) filled with a variety of ingredients including kaya, peanut, and coconut, as well as crisp yam puffs.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The origins of Kuala Selangor's name can be traced back to the early settlements that sprang up along banks of the Selangor River, leading to the Strait of Malacca.

The origin of the name Selangor is interesting, and there are a few versions.

One of the stories suggests that the name is derived from the word "langau" — a blue-bottle fly. According to this story, when a warrior from Melaka who was headed north stopped for a rest with his men, a langau landed on his nose and in a fit of anger he slapped it hard. But it flew away, leaving the warrior with a sore nose. He had never been defeated by anyone, and that too by a fly, so he cancelled his plans to head north and decided to start a settlement. Consequently the place as referred to as Se-langau (one bluebottle fly) and later this became Selangor.

Another story puts the

origin of the name to the Mentangau tree that grew plentifully along the river-banks. The trees would grow so large they could be spotted from the sea, and it became common for traders by Kuala Sungai Mentangau. Over time this was shortened to Kuala Selangau and finally Kuala Selangor.

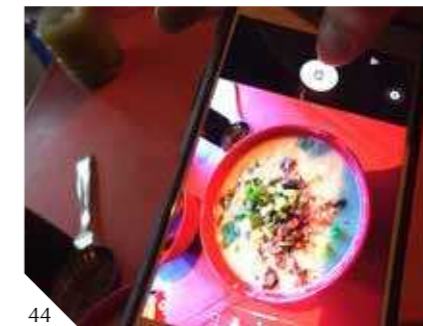
A more macabre version of the name's origins can be traced to its history as the site for the torture of traitors by "salang". A long keris was driven through the left shoulder to the heart and the victims were then left to dry in the sun till they died, "jemur". Joining the two words together became the word "Salangur".

Books on the local history by the Portuguese, Dutch and British spelt Selangor variously as Salangur, Salengor, Sorlangar and Chalangor, to name a few.

Information taken from Kuala Selangor Historical Museum



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SRI SHAKTI DHEVASTHANAM

Jalan Kuala Selangor
Bukit Rotan

Opens from 7am to 12pm
and 4.30 to 9pm

Located on an acre of elevated land, this majestic temple was built by the finest craftsmen from India and took a decade to complete. Illustrations of the Goddess Shakti's myths and legends are carved all around the temple, and the fine details are amplified by the temple's monochromatic theme. Beautiful as this temple is during the day, when night falls and the lights go on, the sight of the temple will surely take your breath away.

of its previous residents, with a 1960s-style sofa in the living room and a meat safe in the kitchen, walking in here feels like you are stepping back in time. The home's setting could not be more charming, standing on stilts at the river's edge, with fishing boats just a stone's throw away.

If at first they are somewhat guarded, after a few bowls of noodles and several plates of food, people like Chai, Lee and their friend Eric Ng — of Fun Life, who operates boat tours in Pasir Penambang — speak of their hopes for their village and hometown. They want more people to visit and take an interest in the sights as well as the communities here, and they would like also for the young people of Kuala Selangor to return and play a role in its growth.

They acknowledge that tourism is changing the face of their villages (like the high fences around the houses in Sasaran's fishing village so visitors do not park on their property) and straining relationships (as one villager becomes more successful than the other), but at 11pm over steaming bowls of lala porridge, everyone seems content.

40. Baked delights and steamed buns at Kedai Kopi Shin Lok

41. Sri Shakti Dhevasthanam Temple at Bukit Rotan, Kuala Selangor

42. Life on the river

43. Nasi lemak Sasaran style has lala (clam) sambal

44. Lala porridge

45. One of the many quaint houses at Sasaran's fishing village

46. The morning market at Sasaran where early birds go for good food

47. A favourite supper spot for Sasaran folk, the speciality is lala porridge and lala omelette



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RESTORAN KIAN (SASARAN LALA PORRIDGE)

41 Jalan Kapar, Sasaran

Jeram

(012) 931 0158

Opens from 7pm to 12am, daily

The speciality here is lala porridge and lala omelette, which is starchier than its oyster omelette cousin from Penang. Regulars also favour the giant siew mai and pan mee.