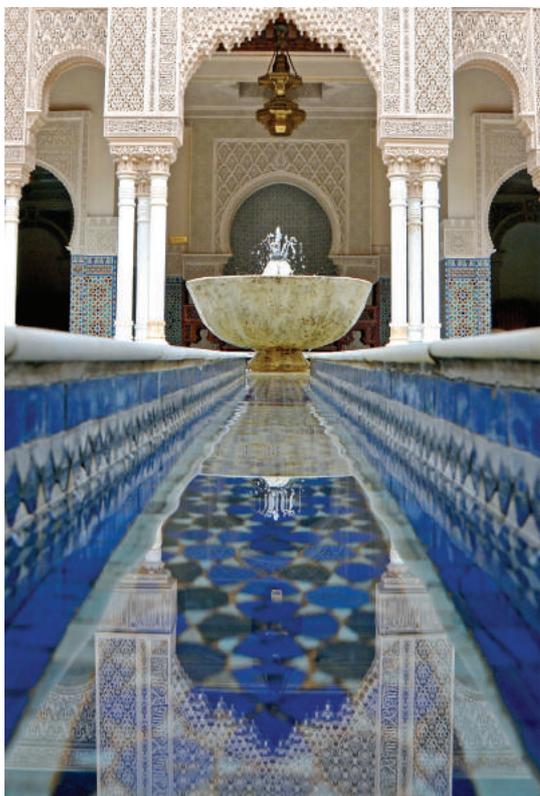
A photograph of a suspension bridge in a dense jungle. The bridge is made of wooden planks and is supported by thick ropes. A sign hanging from the bridge reads "10 METER". The background is filled with tall trees and lush green foliage.

ANG MOH IN THE JUNGLE

MIKE SMITH DIDN'T FIND ALL ASPECTS OF HIS TRIP INTO THE RAINFOREST EASY, BUT HE LEAPT RIGHT IN AND ENJOYED A GREAT EXPERIENCE IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXCITING AND INTERESTING DESTINATIONS.



Kuala Lumpur has many attributes including excellent shopping malls, the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, great food and friendly people; it is also the gateway to Malaysia's eco-tourism and Taman Negara.

CITY SCAPES

On arrival in KL we made a brief visit to Kuala Lumpur City Centre to do a spot of shopping and capture views of the Petronas Twin Towers before grabbing a beer at an Irish pub on lively Jalan Alor. After a good night's rest we headed for Putrajaya the next morning.

Putrajaya is a planned city and home to the federal government of Malaysia. It boasts a very attractive pink mosque and government buildings, but more importantly it was where we started our exploration of Malaysia's eco wonders.

The tour began at Putrajaya Botanical Garden that contains more than 700 species of plants. It is still a work in progress and was practically deserted, but it is an excellent recreational facility, near to a scenic lake, for those wanting a green place to do their workout. The Moroccan Pavilion which showcases the beautiful architecture found in a Marrakesh Palace is perfect for photography despite being a rather unexpected structure in a Malaysian botanical garden.



FANTASY OF THE RAINFOREST

At the nearby Putrajaya International Convention Centre, we were hosted to the enjoyable, hour long 'Fantasy Rainforest', an acrobatic cultural show which brings to life humanity's interaction with the rainforest and the importance of protecting it in a dramatic way.

Leaving Kuala Lumpur for Pahang we were soon in the countryside passing rubber trees and durian plantations and climbing steadily to Tanah Aina Farrah Soraya Eco Tourism Resort which is at 1,700m above sea level and accessed by 4 x 4 vehicles. The accommodation is simple, but clean. I was in a bunkbed in an eight bed dormitory close to a river teeming with fish and frogs.

LEAP OF FAITH

Heights are not my forte and trekking through the jungle and rivers is for younger



folks, but it was very satisfying making it to the waterfall and the resort's signature 'Leap of Faith.' Perhaps it helped that I couldn't wear my glasses and see how high the platform was above the water. I climbed the steps with a fast beating heart and launched myself, without hesitation I must add, into the river more than five metres below. I even have the video as proof!

The early morning walk was a healthy and invigorating start to the day accompanied by song birds and great views over the resort and forest. We certainly earned our breakfast.

There are many elephant sanctuaries in Asia, but Kuala Gandah Orphanage Elephant Sanctuary is one of the most ethical. This sanctuary provides shelter to orphaned and injured elephants before they are rehabilitated in the wild when practical. Two of the elephants are 'challenged' one having lost its tail when attacked by a tiger and another has a prosthetic limb having had its foot amputated in an illegal hunting







“Taman Negara is one of the oldest rainforests in the world dating back 130 million years. It is home to **300 species of birds, 200 species of mammals and 10,000 species of plants.**”

trap. Visitors cannot ride on the elephants, but do get the opportunity to feed them, watch a simple performance of what working elephants are capable of, and get wet and have lots of fun washing them in the river.

THE MUTIARA AT TAMAN NEGARA

Any serious eco-tourism trip in Malaysia is likely to include Taman Negara. The Mutiara Taman Negara National Park Resort with its various chalet options is an ideal base from which to explore the wilderness. There are plenty of alternatives to suit all budgets including camping, ‘capsule rooms’ and guesthouses. Please note that there is a short steep haul from the river to the Mutiara lobby and longish walks to the accommodation for those less mobile, but at least there is an electric luggage lift!

Taman Negara is one of the oldest

rainforests in the world dating back 130 million years. It is home to 300 species of birds, 200 species of mammals and 10,000 species of plants. Activities arranged by the Mutiara included a night jungle walk during which our guide pointed out numerous scorpions, spiders, snakes, insects and unique nocturnal flowers plus several deer at the Observation Hide.

The popular, shaky 530m suspension bridge or Canopy Walkway some 40m above the ground, which is the longest in the world, was a highlight for some the next morning. During the day Malaysian Water Monitors and other smaller lizards, mischievous long-tailed macaques, wild boar and great argus pheasants were observed in the vicinity of the resort.

THE ORANG ASLI

My favourite expedition was a boat ride to an Orang Asli settlement on the banks of the Tembeling River. These shy, nomadic Batek people are short in stature, dark skinned and have curly hair. They live a simple life in palm-thatched huts, mainly surviving on fruit and vegetables and small animals from the forest, but they do welcome guests to their village for a token sum. I wasn’t great with a blow pipe

and wouldn't have killed any wild boar for my supper, but making fire was surprisingly easy using a bamboo rope and a notched piece of wood.

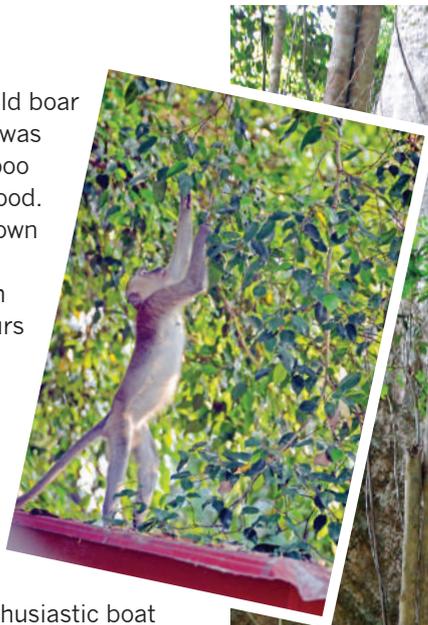
The Orang Asli speak their own language, but a number of the children were having an English lesson when we visited and yours truly spent five minutes as a guest teacher!

Taking a boat along the Tembeling and Tahan rivers was always interesting and the scenery lovely. Being the dry season the water was rather shallow, but we got to shoot some minor rapids and the enthusiastic boat captains made sure we got soaked on more than one occasion.

A RARE SIGHT

You never know what to expect in the jungle it all depends on luck and the skill of your guide. One fortunate group saw an extremely rare black panther cub at the edge of the river! There are massive trees in the rainforest, for example the tualang we saw has been documented at over 250 feet.

The Mutiara has an excellent restaurant, but we also experienced the floating restaurants opposite (which were actually on land as the water level was so low) and a barbeque on a



beach at the side of the river getting there by short cut via a very steep and bumpy track piled into the back of a truck!

HIGH TEA

All too soon it was time to return to Kuala Lumpur, but not before trying out our batik painting and pottery skills at Labu Sentral, Kampung Labu Jerantut.

A fine welcome back to the city was High Tea and a night at the Sheraton. Early evening

saw us checking out Pataling Jaya with its tacky market stalls, but we did get to sample "the best roast duck in Malaysia" from "the spectacle man"!

Thanks to Rozana of Tourism Malaysia Singapore and Azizah

Aziz Tourism Malaysia's Director of Corporate Communications Division for a great trip introducing Malaysia's eco-wonders. ❖

Packet Guide



Tourism Malaysia
www.tourism.gov.my

Malaysia Airlines
www.malaysiaairlines.com

Botanic Gardens Putrajaya
www.ppj.gov.my

Fantasy of the Rainforest
www.fantasyrainforest.com

Taman Aina
www.tanahaina.com

Mutiara Taman Negara Resort
www.mutiarahotels.com

Sheraton Imperial Kuala Lumpur
www.sheraton.com