

StarMetro

THURSDAY

NORTH



29 September 2005
Tel> 04-6473388
Fax> 04-6473371
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Orang asli realm

This orang asli settlement of Kampung Sungai Chuweh is a sight to behold for visitors to the verdant valley of Belum
➤ Story on pages 2 and 3

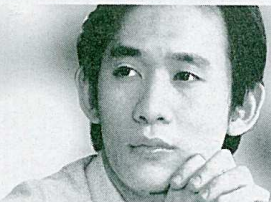


Polytechnic student Noraziah Aziz, 19, showing off the intricate rattan rings made by the orang asli of Kampung Sungai Chuweh



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What's Up

Mental health

PENANG State Health Department is organising a national-level World Mental Health Day from 7.30am to 5.30pm on Saturday at Dewan Milenium, Kepala Batas. A health carnival, with a variety of activities including free health screening, will be held. For details, call 04-2625533.

Stress-free

A COURSE on Stress-free Living will be held from 9am to noon on Saturday at The Peace Palace, 105-A Kelawei Road, Penang. All are welcome. Admission is free. For details, call 04-2288209/013-4301229.

Healing neck

A FREE talk entitled Healing Neck, Arm & Hand Pain by Dr Tim Streit will be held at 2pm on Saturday at Wilkinson Chiropractic Centre, Bellisa Row, Penang. For details, call 04-2296522.

Open Day

THE LohGuanLye Specialists Centre, Penang, is holding an Open Day from 9am to 1pm on Saturday. There will be free blood tests and hearing tests on a first-come-first-served basis. A public talk on breast cancer will be held at 2.30pm. For details, call 04-2288501.

Health care

RETIRED consultant physician Datuk T. Devaraj will speak on Financing Health Care For All Malaysians from 2.30pm to 4.30pm on Sunday at Penang Caring Society Complex, Jalan Utama. Assoc Prof Dr Subramaniam Pillay will also talk on the same subject. Admission is free. For details, call Promoting Activities in Continuing Education at 04-2278611.

Amazing Race

THE International Women's Association (IWA) will hold its first Amazing Race from 8am to 6pm on Sunday at the Penang Municipal Park.

All proceeds from the participation fees will go to charity.

Children aged 10 and above are eligible to take part.

For details, call Irene Leow at 04-2286057 or e-mail: info@iwa-penang.info.

Blessing services

SPECIAL blessing services for PMR students will be held at 9am on Sunday and for SPM, STPM students at 9am on Nov 6 at Mahindarama Buddhist Temple, Kampar Road, Penang. Students and parents are advised to offer prayers to the Buddha and at the temple's Bodhi-Tree for guidance and success in the examinations.

For details, call the temple at 04-2825944.

The lure of Belum

Story and photos by CHRISTINA KOH

PERAK has one of the world's most pristine forests in Belum Valley but many people have yet to see it.

The three-hour drive on the old trunk road from Ipoh may daunt many potential visitors to the 148,900ha area, while some may be unsure about the kind of activities to try out there.

Lately however, the Government and tour operators are making it easier for people and even families with children to visit and spend a few nights in the valley.

Belum Valley in Upper Perak has an amazing biodiversity of flora and fauna that makes it a unique haven for eco-tourists, recreational anglers and adventurers, young and old.

The area is rich with waterfalls, streams, lagoons, limestone outcrops, and islands dotting the numerous waterways that make up Temenggong Lake located within Belum.

It was only from 1991 that the valley, a former communist terrorist and marked black area, was open to the public. Therefore, much of Belum, especially the upper reaches now known as Royal Belum, is largely unexplored.

Those in Ipoh, Kedah or even Penang can be transported by van for a fee to the Lembah Belum Recreational Centre on Pulau Tikus on Temenggong Lake.

The centre, has a dining hall, *surau*, dormitories, four twin-sharing chalets and campsites for those who like to rough it out.

"Our concept is back to nature," said manager Mohammad Mohd Yusof, who added that anglers were encouraged to preserve fish species by practising the catch-and-release method.

The centre offers fishing and nature packages, and packages for groups and individuals with the most expensive costing RM350 each for a three-day two-night stay with food and transportation.

Students need only pay RM35 each per night, said Mohammad.

Activities include bamboo rafting, canoeing,



Orang asli children and a woman relaxing at their unspoilt village on Temenggong Lake in the Belum Valley.

jungle survival courses and boat services to various parts of Belum for fishing, and treks into the jungle for a 'rainforest experience'.

Nature lovers can expect to see wild ginger, orchids, medicinal herbs, aromatic plants, ferns and if lucky, one of the four *Rafflesia* species in the valley such as the *Rafflesia azlanii*, recently

named after the Sultan of Perak.

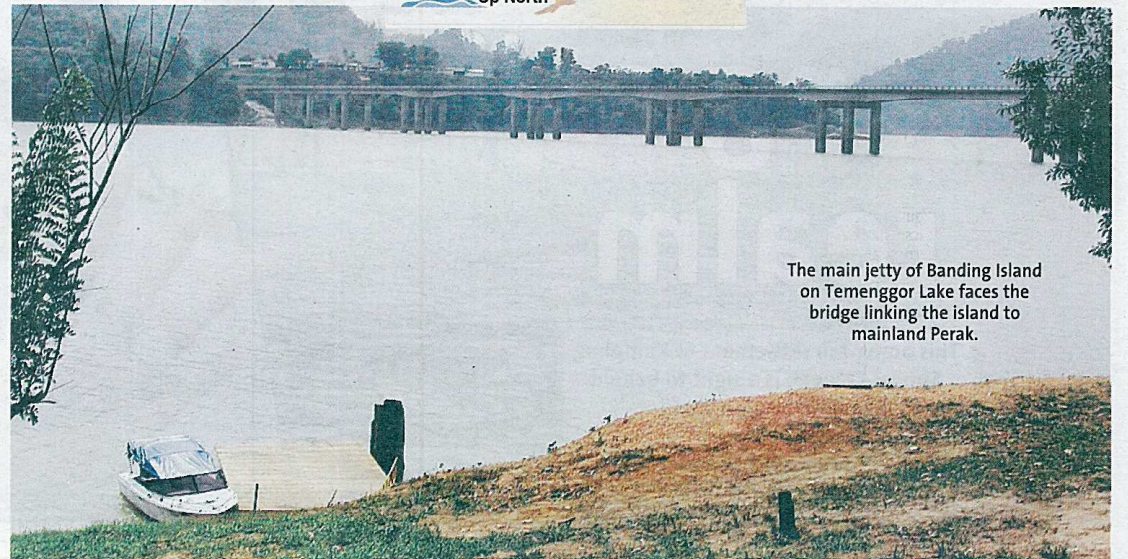
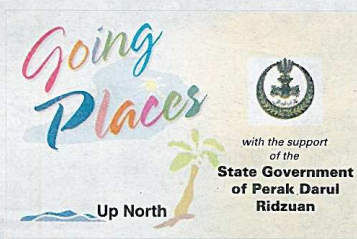
Belum's forests are home to one of the largest concentration of elephants, tigers and otters in Malaysia, and scientific expeditions keep uncovering new species of plants and wildlife native only to the region.

While Sarawak has been described as the 'Land of the Hornbills', the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) has pointed out that all 10 species of Malaysian hornbills can be found within the Belum forests.

Watching swarms of hornbills take flight into the sky is a favourite activity among visitors to Belum.

Mohammad said visitors at the centre were usually foreigners who sometimes requested to see up close wild animals, like the clouded leo-

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The main jetty of Banding Island on Temenggong Lake faces the bridge linking the island to mainland Perak.

Cut and stick on your refrigerator

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International Operator	108	Kampung Baru	4686760
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Perlis State Park	9782812/ 9765966 Ext: 25	Tenaga Nasional Bhd	9760440
Perlis Snake Farm	9768511		

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A paradise waiting to be discovered



Tok Batin Khe Wah of Kampung Sungai Chuweh impressing a group of visitors with his skill at using the blowpipe.

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pard, panther, Malayan sun bear, tapir, gaur and sambar deer.

"We'd take them to salt licks to stay in observation shelters overnight because all kinds of animals are drawn to salt licks.

"Sometimes you can hear the noise made by big animals when they pass near the shelter. It can be a bit risky, but some guests like a bit of danger," he said.

First-time visitors will realise that Belum is not all forest. At the heart of it is the man-made Temenggor Lake, which was created in 1978 as a water catchment area for the Temenggor hydroelectric dam.

A number of orang asli communities, who still practise a nomadic lifestyle, have adapted to their new way of life by the lake and welcome visitors to their village.

One such village is Kampung Sungai Chuweh whose picturesque clump of huts on a hilly plateau rising above the water is most eye-catching.

Village headman Tok Batin Khe Wah, 36, said 90 orang asli have been planting rambutan and durian trees as a source of income.

During the day, usually morning, the orang asli take visitors to tour their village and see their way of life as well as demonstrate their skills in using the blowpipe and churning out rattan handicraft.

"We also have huts where guests can stay for RM10 a night," said Khe.

Guests can also opt to stay at the Banding Island Resort, a two-star establishment with 27 rooms located on the island itself.

The resort also offers various packages for guests, such as picnics, island hopping and visits to Gua Cermin and Kubang Gajah, an 'elephant playground'.

One of Belum's strongest lures is the previously inaccessible Royal Belum state park whose 117,500ha of virgin forest is bigger than Penang Island and the oldest in Peninsular Malaysia.

For security reasons, visitors need a special permit to get in but this need not be a hassle, said Perak State Park Corporation assistant general manager Iydia Ainuddin.

Iydia said visitors could contact the corporation, which manages tourism in Royal Belum, two weeks in advance.

"The permit is free. All you have to do is fill in a form with your name, address, identity card number and the date of arrival and departure.

"The application will go through the police to check whether the army is carrying out any military exercises at certain times of the year," she said.

Royal Belum boasts rocky hills, tranquil streams and a million-year-old rainforest environment few people have set eyes on.

The forest is populated with fascinating animals like the blue-striped beetle, the clouded leopard, dragonflies, the forest gecko, the tree-climbing brown tree toad and the blue-crowned hanging parrot that sleeps upside down.

Iydia said many of the visitors, however, were anglers who liked to fish for toman, tengas, sebarau and even the elusive and protected ikan kelah in the waters of Royal Belum.

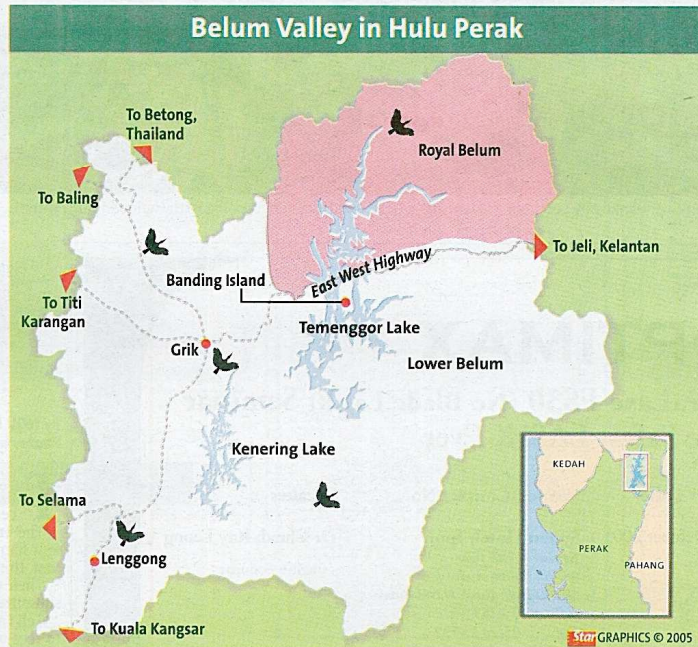
"The ikan kelah is hard to catch because it is sensitive to movement in the water and hence won't swim to the surface," she said.

Depending on the number of people in the group, it can cost between RM400 and RM800 each for a three-day, two-night guided tour with food and accommodation.

However, said Iydia, groups were limited to no more than 20 people and only 50 visitors were allowed per month.

"We are trying to preserve Royal Belum so that there is minimal disturbance to the wildlife and its habitat," she said.

For those who want to get close to nature, Belum can be a hidden paradise.



HOW TO GET THERE

FOR those who want to drive to the Belum Valley, the new Kuala Kangsar-Griik Highway cuts travelling time by over an hour and should be open to motorists by end of October.

From Ipoh, one should take the North-South Expressway to Kuala Kangsar and after paying the toll, look out for the sign to Griik.

Alternatively, the Medan Gopeng terminal in Ipoh has bus services to Griik town (see accompanying box).

From Griik, it is a 40km journey along the East-West Highway to Belum, whose interior is accessible through Banding Island and its main jetty.

For those who arrived at Griik by bus, take the Transnational bus for Tanah Merah, Kelantan, at 2.15pm from the Griik bus station.

Tell the bus driver you want to stop at Banding Island; the fare should be RM3.

There are also taxis (RM50 per trip) at Griik to take you to and from the island.

CONTACT NUMBERS

Lembah Belum Recreational

Centre
Tel No: 012-4836903 (Mohammad Mohd Yusoff)
Fax No: 05-7913448
Email: berusa_nature@hotmail.com
Belum Eco Tours
Tel No: 05-2810834 / 03-77810593
Website: www.belumtours.com

Banding Island Resort
Tel No: 05-7921791 / 7921792
Fax No: 05-7921793
Email: bvresort@tm.net.my
Perak State Park Corporation (Perbadanan Taman Negeri Perak)
Tel No: 05-7914543
Fax No: 05-7912641
Email: Iydia@yahoo.co.uk

ACCOMMODATION

The Forestry Department manages a number of campsites (RM10) and longhouses (RM50) within Belum.

The Perak Tourism Action Council also has a list of all the chalets and hotels offering cheap accommodation around Griik town.

Hulu Perak District Forestry Department

Ranger Khairul Zuzaidy
05-7915180
Perak Tourism Action Council
7 & 9, Jln Medan Istana 3, Bandar Ipoh Raya, 30000 Ipoh, Perak.
Tel No: 05-2550413 / 2550414

BUS SERVICES TO GRIK

1) Perak Roadways
Ipoh – Griik
Departs from Medan Kidd, Ipoh
8am, 10am, 12pm, 2pm, 4pm, 6.30pm
05-2544895 (Ipoh), 05-7911861 (Griik)
Ticket Fare RM9.50

2) Mahligai Ekspres
Ipoh – Kota Baru (Stops at Griik)
Departs from Medan Gopeng, Ipoh
10am, 10pm
05-3111533
Ticket Fare RM10
3) Rasima Ekspres
Ipoh – Kota Baru (Stops at Griik)
Departs from Medan Gopeng, Ipoh
9am, 10pm
05-3138998
Ticket Fare RM12.70 (Griik)