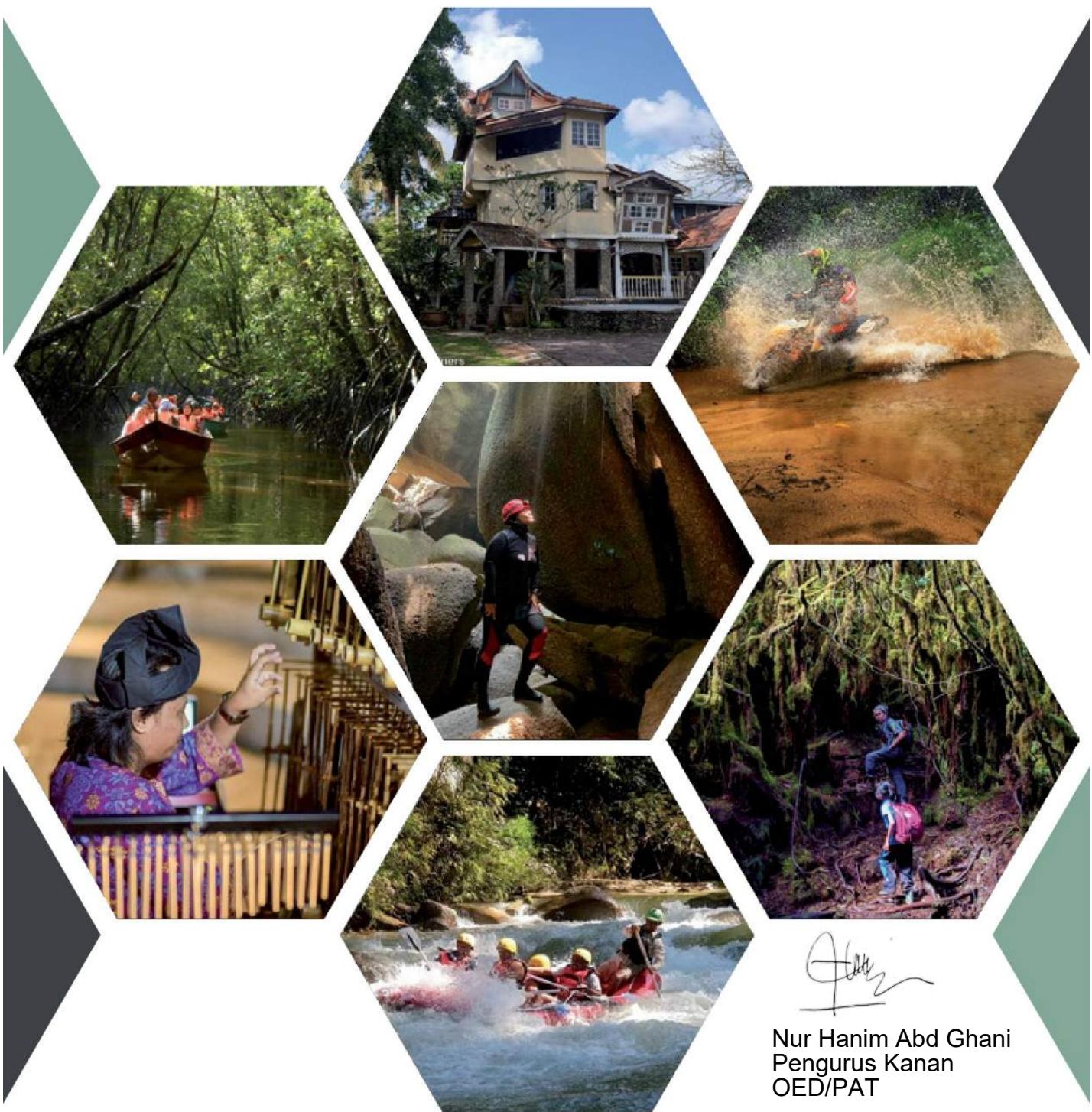


SHOWCASING **MALAYSIA'S** *Tourism Heroes* 2.0



Nur Hanim Abd Ghani
Pengurus Kanan
OED/PAT

Saya memperakui bahawa perkhidmatan
ini telah dilaksanakan dengan sempurna.



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For further information, please contact:

Director General
Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Lorong Produktiviti, Jalan Sultan
46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
MALAYSIA

Tel : + (603) – 7955 7266
Fax : + (603) – 7957 8068
Email : marketing@mpc.gov.my
Website : www.mpc.gov.my



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SHOWCASING

MALAYSIA'S

Tourism Heroes **2.0**



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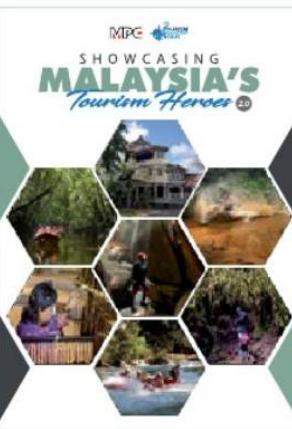
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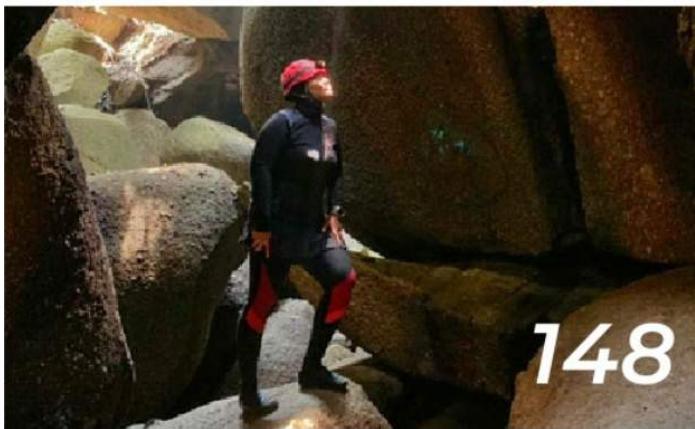


COVER RATIONALE :

Heroes have several traits in common. These include concern, for others or the environment. Also courage, conviction, determination, honesty, integrity and selflessness. These seven traits are represented by seven images arranged in a hexagonal form, like a beehive. Without realising it, bees are one of the heroes of our environment and collectively embody the traits mentioned. We celebrate these heroic traits in this publication.

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FOREWORD



Director General of Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC)

I am, on behalf of Malaysia Productivity Corporation, very grateful and proud that this publication has been released, smack in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the world.

Indeed, with the lockdown and precautions taken, much of the work had to be done remotely through online meetings, calls and recordings, then electronically exchanged with the translator-writers and book designers back and forth till completion. Most of the parties involved, from the business owners to MPC staff and external consultants, never met each other in person throughout. Yet despite the physical and psychological disruptions and other impacts that the coronavirus dealt upon us, our productivity continued.

This publication is the second volume in its series, the first of which had been published in 2019. Like its predecessor, this book showcases not just the exemplary and highly productive Malaysian companies in the tourism industry, but just as importantly it presents different aspects of their respective productivity and success.

These companies in fact embody a diversity in terms of type and size of business, resources and abilities, approach to operations and marketing and more. Yet all have several core qualities in common that have been critical to their achievements. Without divulging too much - as I would prefer for you, gentle reader, to read about them yourself in the following chapters - I would just say that they revolve around a combination of having great personal attitude, passion and motivation, harnessing knowledge and skills, embracing opportunities and change, and not forgetting teamwork empowerment and networking exchange.

So go ahead, read their shared individual stories; learn their lessons, be inspired and be ever more productive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dato' Abdul Latif Bin Haji Abu Seman'.

DATO' ABDUL LATIF BIN HAJI ABU SEMAN
Director General
Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC)

FOREWORD



Champion of Tourism Productivity Nexus (TPN)

This publication comes out at an unprecedented and critical time of Covid-19 for our tourism industry in Malaysia and the entire world. The many records of best practices and great achievements of the featured excellent companies in here are unfortunately overshadowed by the near-collapse of global tourism.

Nonetheless, we never give up, and Tourism Productivity Nexus (TPN), together with Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC), are at the forefront in spearheading proactive responses to 'reset tourism', with multi-pronged efforts to revitalise and give confidence to all our tourism players, our people and even the world. We are taking proactive measures which includes systematising, regulating and even branding our recovery and safety plans. For example, under the existing Malaysia Tourism Excellence certification or MaTEX, of which most of these companies in this book have deservedly been awarded, we have incorporated the anti Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures that all tourism operators must adhere to, and even better, be certified in compliance. Not only will this adherence help fight the virus, it will also boost confidence of travellers within this planned nationwide safety zone, thus helping the industry and the country.

In addition, we have also put into practice certain targeted programmes that aim to help all those in the industry affected by the virus situation, namely the Malaysia Virtual Experience online tours project or MyVXp, and also our TPN Virtual Advisory Clinic or T-VAC, among other efforts. True to its name, T-VAC is a virtual one-stop advisory platform that helps evaluate and see what can be done at the relevant levels to help travel companies be productive even within these less than satisfying circumstances. It's good to see that several companies in the MaTEX-certified list here are also taking advantage of T-VAC, as all should be where felt necessary.

Together we will work through this period of global pain, and all the fine lessons that this book's featured travel and adventure businesses have given will be used for the betterment of our tourism industry and our country again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "UZAIDI UDAKIS".

UZAIDI UDAKIS
Champion
Tourism Productivity Nexus

THE TRAVEL COMPANY WITH A TWIST OF HI-TECH AND A LOT OF FAITH

ARBA
TRAVEL





Established in 2014, ARBA Travel & Tours Sdn. Bhd. (ARBA) is rather unusual as it was begun by three foreign graduate Malaysians with various strengths in information technology, and has now become one of the fastest-growing travel companies in the country whereas many other tour businesses are floundering.

From the initial three, ARBA now has a current strength of 68 fulltime staff, with an average staff age of just 28 years and a whopping 30 percent having Masters and Ph.D degrees, thus adding a whole list of impressive statistics about this unique travel company. Team ARBA now has in-house staff who speak Korean, Japanese, French, Arabic and other languages besides of course, Malay and English.

ARBA is known as a travel company and not a travel agency as its business model is more on empowering travellers rather than just offering tours, plus it has international hubs in five other countries including Korea, France, Turkey, Australia and Japan.

As a travel company, ARBA promotes a difference in inbound and outbound travel practices that are conceptualised as follows: 'No tourist traps', 'Super saving, budget, premium', 'Halal food and prayers cared for', 'Fully licensed and trusted', 'Joined tour & private tour' and 'Strategically located hotels'.

ARBA's uniqueness extends into its corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach, with its evocatively named 1Moment4Them projects, which are more of planned welfare philanthropy. This is not the usual

run-of-the-mill CSR as done by corporations to get tax breaks and build brand name through selected give-outs. As proof, through 1Moment4Them, the ARBA team members themselves go down to the ground volunteering their time and effort to help actual causes, some of which are not in the public eye.

One of these is helping the plight of citizen-less kids in Sabah and another is the lower-level mental health crisis, where the health system usually focuses on only major mental issues.

This effort is a core value of ARBA that is manifested into reality through *Khidmah* (serving value to others). From its inception ARBA's founders made giving the best value to others as part of their *niat* or intention.





Mr. Ammar Roslizar
Chief Executive Officer

“

ARBA offers unique travel experiences, especially its tours package for overseas holidays. In fact, ARBA always promotes a difference in both inbound and outbound travel practices by the company as it ensures that all its packages offered must have these advantages; 'No tourist traps', 'Super saving, budget or premium choices', 'Halal food and prayers cared for', 'Fully licensed and trusted', 'Joined tour or private tour' and 'Strategically located accommodation'.

To fully optimise its work efficiency, ARBA approaches this aim by digitalising almost all of its work processes, thus enabling its workforce to concentrate on the most important activity; sales, which can then be truly focused on and done more efficiently. For ARBA, the harnessing of approved customer profiling data is very critical in ensuring that ARBA's marketing campaigns are directed towards the most appropriate target groups.

”

ARBA OFFERINGS PACKAGED WITH A DIFFERENCE

The travel business for ARBA began with outbound trips as the company's pioneers had studied overseas and were familiar with foreign sojourns. ARBA's founders are overseas grads who studied in Japan, Korea, UK, France etc. and they love to travel, so the business of travelling overseas is a "low hanging fruit" for them.

As ARBA's Chief Executive Officer, Ammar Roslizar explains, "When you study overseas, you see and experience things that you don't as a normal tourist", and this helps ARBA understand and offer what others who have no such experience need long exposure to learn. Besides bringing customers to interesting destinations, all ARBA's outbound packages offered are 100 percent *halal* and senior citizen friendly, with full board or ground package only and other choices.

Umrah packages designated UmrahHijrah are also offered in various levels and prices to cater to a variety of customer preferences. Among the packages' highlights and advantages are - ARBA is fully licensed and trusted, being in SME Corp's Top 30 list; Umrah modules

are programmed by two *ustaz* from Makkah and Jordan for the best spiritual immersion; Mutawifs who are experienced and serve from the heart, and; hotels just 50m from Masjidil Haram for ease of worship at the grand mosque.

UMRAH HIJRAH[®] BY ARBA TRAVEL



Penghayatan Umrah

Modul fokus penghayatan. Dihasilkan oleh 2 orang *ustaz* dari Jordan & Mekah.

Layanan Dari Hati

Mutawif berpengalaman memberikan pengisian rohani & menjaga kebajikan.

Hotel Dekat 50m

Hotel yang selesa, dekat & mudah untuk beribadah di Masjidil Haram.

Berlesen & Dipercaya

Diberikan pengiktirafan sebagai syarikat Top 30 oleh SME Corp Malaysia.

Pakej Budget

Dari RM **5697**

Hotel Mekah 5 Star (50M)

Pakej Premium

Dari RM **6397**

Hotel Mekah 5 Star (50M)

Pakej Platinum

Dari RM **7197**

Hotel Mekah 5 Star (50M)

Pakej Ramadhan

Dari RM **8997**

Hotel Mekah 5 Star (50M)

Outbound packages offered by ARBA include to Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, the Maldives, Turkey and Europe including the Balkans.

To optimise their operations ARBA JV (joint venture) has five international hubs in Korea, France, Australia, Japan and Turkey. The JV's first phase between ARBA and their joint international hubs is to give the best customer travel service for the Malaysian tourists who are ARBA's clients. Phase two of the JV is in planning where all the international hubs will bring tourists from the foreign countries to visit Malaysia.

Inbound packages focus on two concepts; island tours and local cultural attractions. A good 87 percent of clients for ARBA's

inbound business are Malaysians who love to holiday at Malaysia's islands, which are of international standard. These include Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Redang, Pulau Langkawi and the islands off Semporna, Sabah. Local cultural tours, on the other hand, are culture and heritage trips to places such as Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Kundasang. To optimise for best local operations, ARBA has branches in Kota Kinabalu, Pulau Perhentian and Semporna.

ARBA also offers a la carte bookings where users can make various online purchases for airline tickets, places of attraction both inside and outside Malaysia, obtain or pay for visas for Australia and China, and even source for ground tour guides, all through their website.

HARNESSING DATA TO UNDERSTAND ARBA'S CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

For ARBA, the need to study customer behaviour is critically important so that tourism products that they offer are always in tune with the latest trends and preferences.

This can only be done with comprehensive data collection that has been implemented by ARBA since even when the company was founded in 2014.

Various successful tour and marketing decisions were made using the customer behaviour data harvested.



This is where ARBA's founders' expertise in IT comes into play. The data collection is a system that was developed by ARBA itself for its Customer Relations Management (CRM). The system records and tabulates the data from as many as 30,000 customers that ARBA gets annually.

All the data is collected automatically and kept in the system since all bookings, enquiries and so on are made through the system even if it is made by telephone. A first-time customer is invited to provide basic information, and all data is secure and private for the customer's ease of future reference.

The customer profile data that is collected is analysed to recognise accurate customer preferences, and thus eliminates any guessing games. The analyses conducted enable ARBA's sales team to formulate various well-targeted marketing strategies while also allowing personalised plans. The results also help to introduce even customised travel and ground packages for each overseas trip that is done through ARBA.

As per customer type and preference, ARBA introduces ground packages where customers would use tour guides who are assigned according to the itinerary that ARBA has provided. Additionally, ARBA

also offers optional add-on items, for example to visit certain places other than in the programme during the free and easy time that is allowed in the itinerary. Of course, to begin with, customers are given the freedom to choose travel packages and options that fit their respective budgets.

Meanwhile for the island vacations, ARBA notes that customers more usually prefer to just chill with great views, beach and leisure activities around the islands, and especially diving. For these, ARBA even equips each of their guides with an iPhone 10 for which they are trained to use and help take great images for their visitors even while diving. Thus, it is a value-added service where their guide uses a sophisticated smartphone to capture the best memories for ARBA's customers.

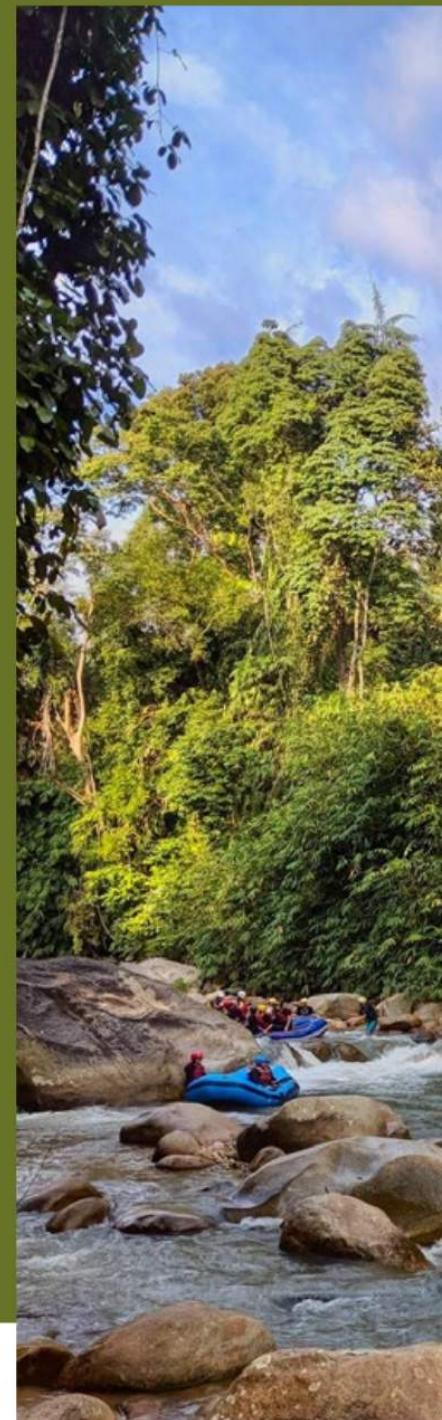
The customer data is also used to even formulate promotions that appeal to targeted groups. As an example, tour packages that are geared more to nature will reach customers whose profiling has indicated a liking for natural attractions, nature destinations and activities, while packages that are more to shopping will be sent to those who prefer shopping opportunities. With this data system, the sales team is able to promote items that attract customers with their desired preferences.

To raise affordability for all customers, ARBA also provides the option for them to pay for their packages through instalments. All customers are also encouraged to make their bookings online by for example: "Discount RM100/Pax if booked online". This is aimed at maximising sales without having to manage processing manually.



AUTOMATION IS THE WAY TO GO

ARBA developed an impressive 12 systems all in-house, divided into two categories namely Customer First Delivery and Innovation for Productivity.



The Customer First Delivery systems were created to enable ARBA to analyse data automatically for customer profiling to understand their behaviour and thus formulate more effective marketing strategies. This aims to raise sales through well-targeted promotions.

The second category is in line with ARBA's Travel Tech Team's motto, which is in fact, "We automate the boring stuff so that our people can

focus on more important matters – the customer". All bookings do not need to be keyed in manually but go directly into the automated system, which optimises the sales team's work by then allowing them to focus on the most important thing - selling.

To greatly simplify the receipt system for the tourism activities both in-country and overseas made by ARBA's tour guides or staff, they no longer need to attach the hardcopy

of receipts, but just need to snap a clear photograph and upload into the system. This facilitates the Finance Unit in making fast reimbursements to guides or record expenses immediately and helps eliminate the problem of lost receipts.

Each staff member also has a performance achievement dashboard that is monitored by an Intelligent Delegate System. Among the KPIs that are in this dashboard include number of customers that are managed by each salesperson. The system then delegates incoming customers according to the workload of each sales team member, and also captures their response time.

For every trip that is organised, all documents are scanned including passports, flight documentation, booking slips and all other paperwork. The documents are all then uploaded into the system to enable staff, tour guides and participants to retrieve them without having to physically hold a hardcopy.

Beyond these travel and tour facilities, ARBA's uniqueness is that it offers customers the best convenience of easy-to-use online travel services and secure personal tour accounts that can be managed 24/7 by customers everywhere, and yet when they need personal human assistance it is readily available in-house.

Now it becomes clear from where emerges ARBA's IT strength and focus on offering different, better, convenient and automated online travel services for their customers. Pretty much all their systems were developed in-house and also customised to give maximum ease of use for travellers under ARBA's ambit. There is even a dedicated internal Travel Tech Team of seven coders and programmers who create ARBA's own new programmes and systems, while improving existing ones.



A WORK ETHIC CULTURE THAT IS INGRAINED INTO ALL STAFF MEMBERS

Human resource management is certainly not ignored by ARBA. It is in fact enshrined in the company's stated value system (which not many companies have), called *Budi* that embodies the marriage of the humane experience with high technology.

'Budi' is a powerful *Malay* word that combines the meanings of 'courtesy' and 'giving', which ARBA cites in a *Malay* poetic stanza or '*pantun*', as follows;

A house stands through its joints,
When joints fail the house falls.
A nation's joints lies in courtesy,
When courtesy fails the nation falls.

*Tegak rumah kerana sendi,
Runtuh sendi rumah binasa.
Sendi bangsa ialah budi,
Runtuh budi runtuhlah bangsa.*

For ARBA, *Budi* as explained by CEO Ammar is, "How we interact with others, through our hearts and minds, how we fulfil each other's dreams and needs as a community, a nation", where a human-friendly IT system backed by personal customer service embodies the company's *Budi* approach of 'giving' and 'courtesy' with customers.

Together with *Budi*, the company has five competencies or foci that systemise its success. These are in five D's namely; Design as the fundamental way of thinking Data as the ultimate tool in decision making, Digital as the central infrastructure of the company, Distribution as the main pillar of strength, and Dollar as the key resource to strive for in its vision.

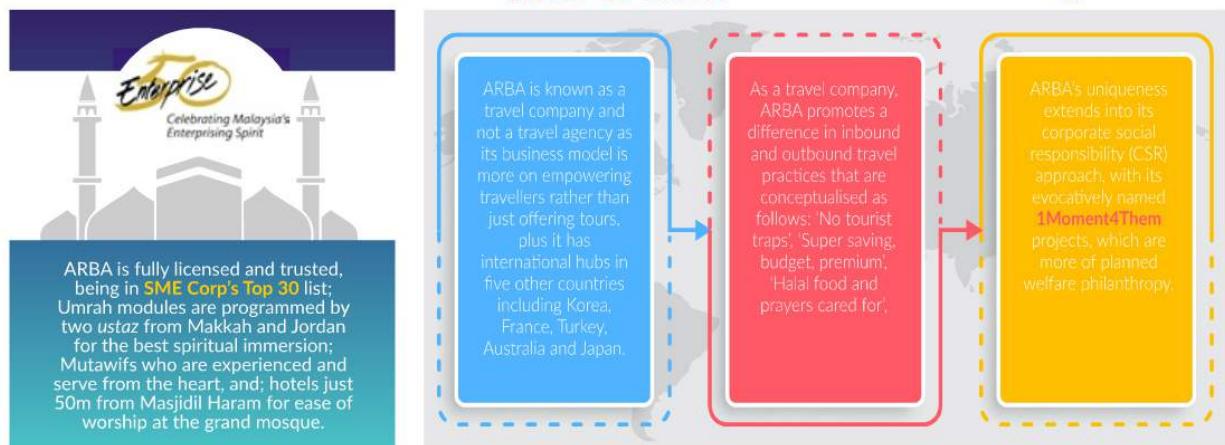
One very unusual corporate practice in ARBA is the system of internal personal distribution of rewards, where each employee is given RM100 monthly per person for them to allocate, say RM10 to each person who helps them on an internal peer to peer basis, thus inculcating a culture of assisting, recognising and rewarding – which increases productivity.

This internal investment of almost RM7,000 per month, as part of

ARBA's *Budi* culture is also reflected in what is named LISA, in the form of allocation of travel and tour booking commissions, which again raises motivation and productivity. All these form part of the last of the five D's i.e. Dollar, and recognises that monetary rewards are a normal part of business and work ethics when done properly and systemically.



ARBA TRAVEL & TOURS SDN. BHD.
THE TRAVEL COMPANY WITH A TWIST OF HI-TECH AND A LOT OF FAITH



ARBA OFFERINGS PACKAGED WITH A DIFFERENCE



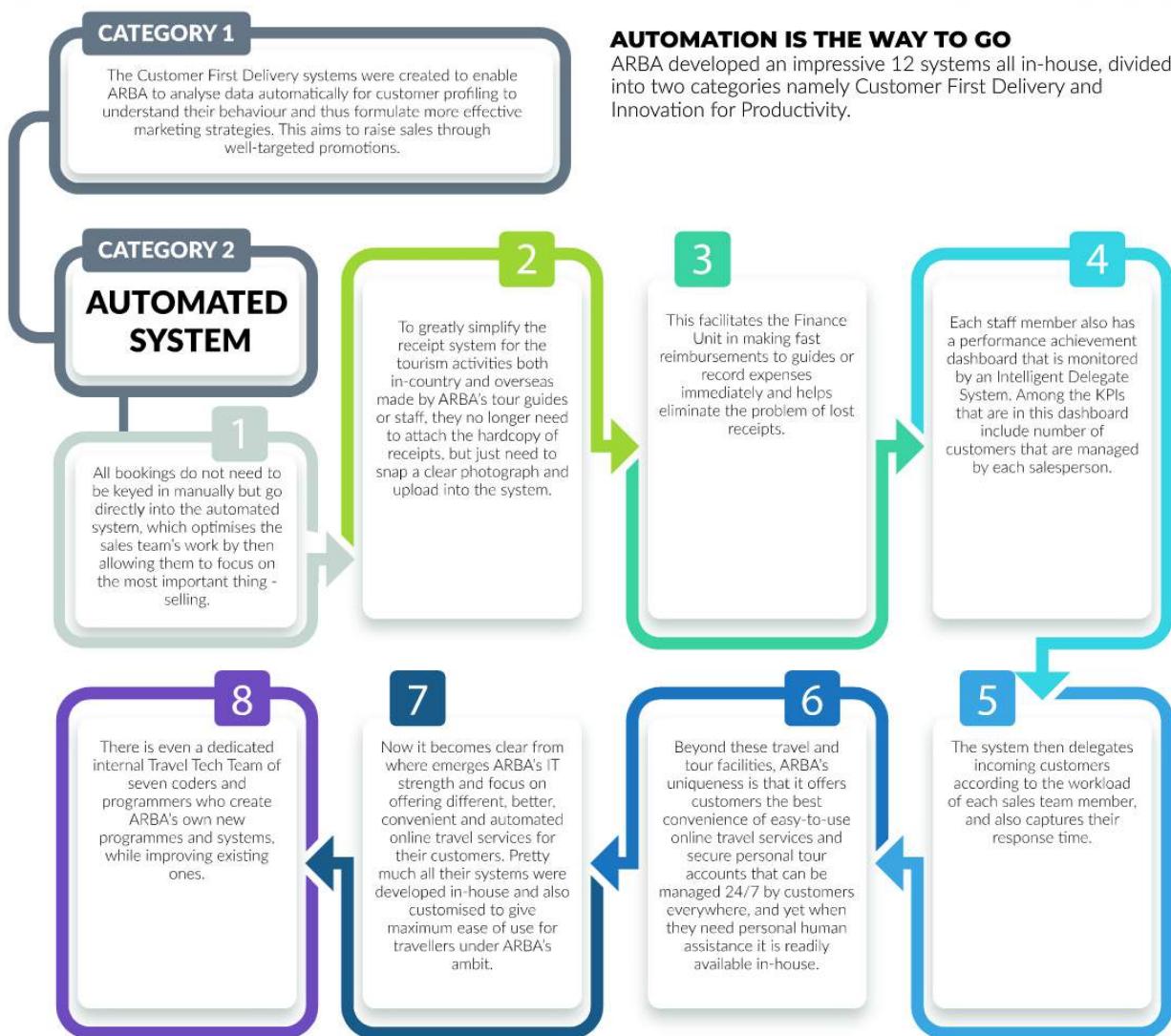
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30,000

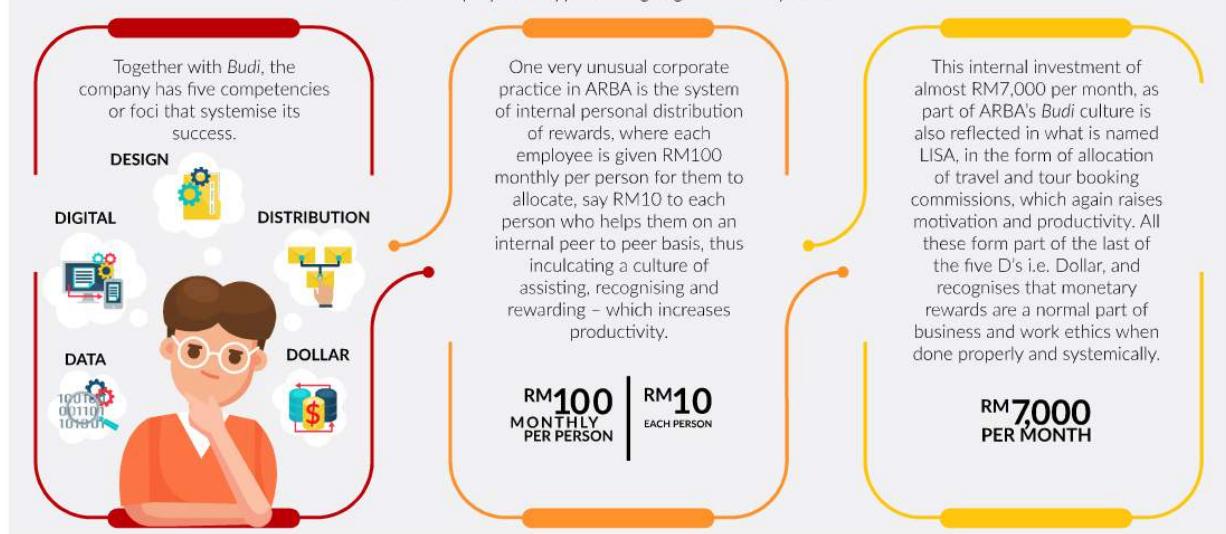
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RM100
Pax

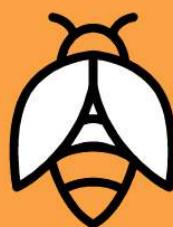


A WORK ETHIC CULTURE THAT IS INGRAINED INTO ALL STAFF MEMBERS

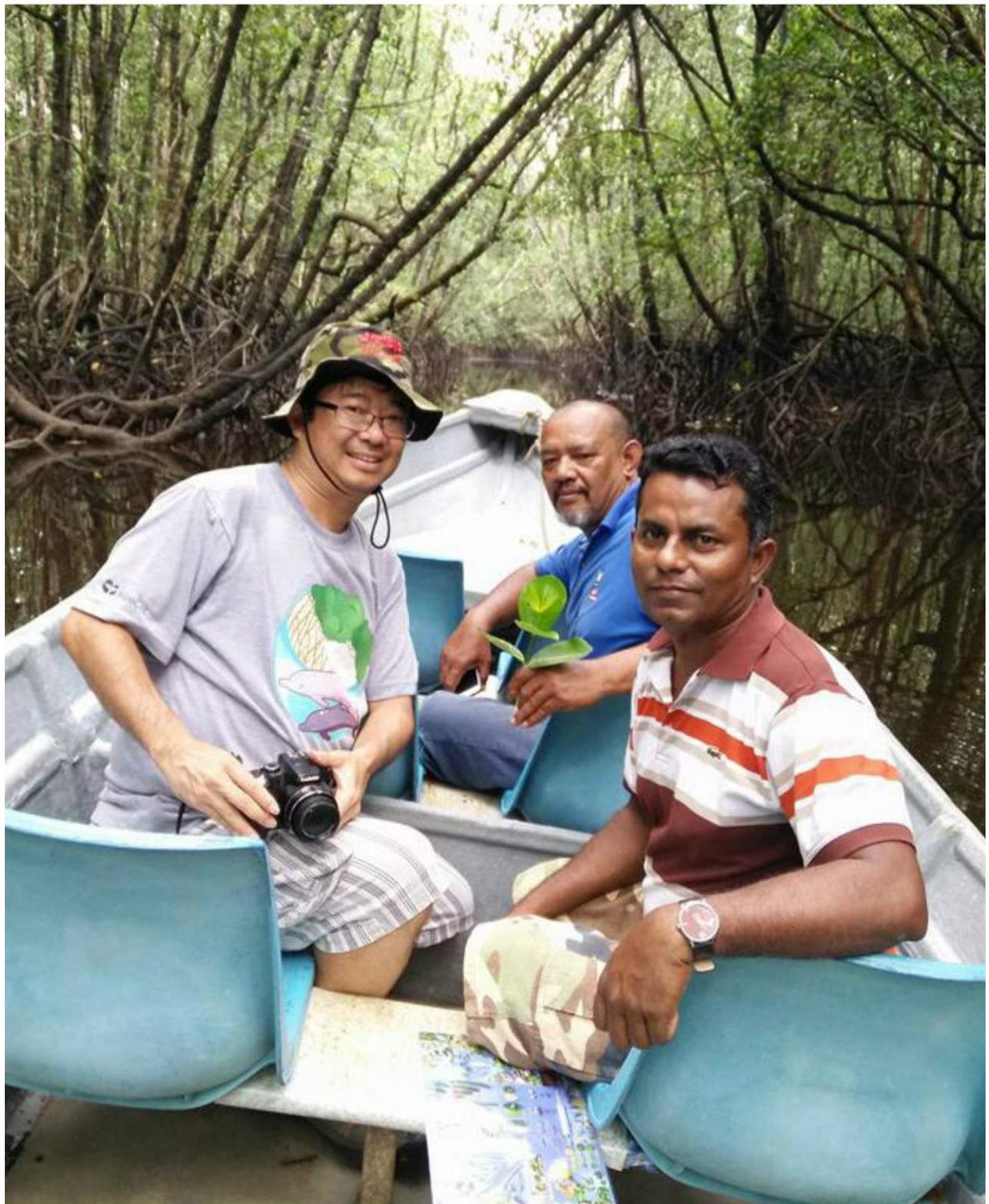
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FROM
I DON'T KNOW'
TO NOW THE
WORLD KNOWS...



HAFIZ'S CHERATING
ACTIVITIES



IT BEGAN WITH NO KNOWLEDGE, JUST A BOAT AND CONCERNED CONFIDENCE



Today, Hafiz's Cherating Activities (HCA) brand is not only one of the best-known tour operators in Cherating, Pahang but is also known around the world. Hafiz has served tens of thousands of visitors from near and far, many of whom say they came because of others' recommendations for his tours; a signature offering being the Cherating River fireflies boat trip, of which he himself has helped to ensure the conservation of these sensitive kelip-kelip insects.



Pusat Informasi Fireflies

Hafiz's fame is recorded world-wide via recommendations in global guide books such as Lonely Planet, as well as hundreds of social media postings from satisfied visitors around the globe. His excellent tours have helped put the Cherating region firmly on the world tourism map.

BUT HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

It began a little over 12 years ago in 2007, beginning with almost nothing. Hafiz was then looking for an income, so he invested in a small 8-seater boat – which was all he could afford - and started offering simple mangrove river tours. But as he admitted, he had almost no knowledge of the area or of its nature, as it was not his birthplace. All he had were the passion and concern for the river area's beautiful environment and confidence that he could make good of it.

He relates that in his first tours, when passengers on his boat asked him anything about the environment, trees or wildlife, many of his answers would be, "I don't know". But they



could see his enthusiasm, as when he would point out a *biawak* and try to get them the best position to view the big lizard while maintaining respectful distance. In fact, it was tourists who taught him that it was called 'monitor lizard'.

Many tourists especially foreigners take it upon themselves to instead teach him what they knew. And they

could see that Hafiz was keen to learn. Indeed, he also did his own research for relevant information wherever he could find it. He quickly began building his own wealth of knowledge and how to tell its stories in his tours, making his tours gain popularity.



In the meantime, he observed a few boats once in a while setting down the river with visitors soon after sunset, and found out that they went to watch fireflies. When he saw these little treasures up close himself, he fell in love with them and began doing firefly boat tours as well.

Again, his knowledge and skills increased until in 2009 two professors of entomology (the study of insects) came from Japan and chose his services in their studies of local fireflies and other native insects and nature.

Hafiz himself learned so much from the Japanese professors and became somewhat a practical expert himself. Today, he is even known as the **"Fireflies Whisperer"** for his expertise and ability to seemingly talk to and understand these special creatures.

Over the years, HCA expanded until he not only owned 10 boats but also offered river kayaking, sea activities such as island-hopping, snorkelling, banana boat and doughnut boat riding, and even ATV scrambling, with a matching increase in staffing. Other activities also include mangrove tree-planting, turtle egg-laying watching and baby turtle releasing. Still, river mangrove-touring and fireflies-watching remained his biggest offerings, amounting up to 90 percent of HCA's total revenue.



Pahang fireflies watch with Hafiz



Mangrove Trees Planting Program



Mr. Mohd Hafiz Abdul Majid
Founder

“

In order to attract even more foreign tourists, HCA improved its mangrove tour services by diving deeper into the world of fireflies; amassing as much information through local observation, reading as well as attending knowledge events, and sharing the knowledge. This enabled us to give interesting and finely detailed explanations about these amazing creatures, and this is what differentiated HCA from other operators.

Foreign tourists are more interested in the concept of edu-tours (educational tours) and it is this concept that local operators need to offer in order to rank Malaysia as among the must-visit places on the world map. Besides that, collaboration with other product providers in the locality is also very important, so that there is a welcome diversity of local offerings. In turn that will attract tourism spending and raise the local economy and resident's income. This is HCA's firm belief in helping to form a sustainable tourism ecosystem in Cherating.

”

CUSTOMER SERVICE

EXPANDING THE PASSION WHILE EXPANDING THE BUSINESS



Mangrove River Tours

In the early days of HCA, his personal passion ensured that customers would get the best attention and service. He would be there, day in and day out, running around taking care of all aspects of the business and most importantly ensuring smooth and satisfying tours and activities for participants.

But with expansion of business and staff numbers, he needed to ensure that all staff especially front-liners also give the best service to customers. While training is one method, Hafiz also monitors staff daily as he goes around.

He listens to how staff interact with visitors, and takes steps to guide them if any aspect is lacking. For example, he is particular that staff do not just give a brochure and ask visitors to read it if they have questions.

Hafiz finds encouraging ways to get staff to understand the reasons for the need to always give the best, polite and efficient customer service. The simplest and obvious is a reminder to staff that, "If more tourists keep coming, the company gets honest money to pay salaries, and you have a proper halal job".

It works, as tourists keep coming even from far-flung countries that he and his staff have never heard of! But surprisingly they say that they heard of HCA through word of mouth back home.

In addition to excellent customer service, the tour content and commentary throughout the trip are also among the factors that make HCA a main choice especially among foreigners to closely witness the fireflies in Malaysia, particularly in Cherating. This is because besides Hafiz himself, his staff are also trained and able to give a captivating story commentary.

This includes so many details, from the history and life cycle to the uniqueness of the fireflies, that are given throughout the one-hour tour along the Cherating River. HCA offers two river mangrove tours daily, the day and night excursions with a maximum number of 60 passengers per trip. Indeed, HCA's tours come highly recommended by the Lonely Planet guide book.

For HCA, as for any business, the need to create and promote packages to tourists effectively is of paramount importance. After attending an Inbound Tourism Bootcamp (ITB) organised by Tourism Productivity Nexus (TPN) of Malaysia Productivity Corporation, HCA and other course participants were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed in establishing an effective approach in formulating, marketing and selling local tourism products among tourism enablers, besides being the best host of the country.

HCA gained valuable ideas, knowledge and skills to improve marketing strategies such as tailoring attractive packages according to target groups, and more. Besides, HCA was also able to get to know other industry players at the ITB, which created invaluable networking among course alumni.



PROMOTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY, SHARING WITH LOCAL OPERATORS





Many recent tourists even contact ahead to book tours with Hafiz first, then only think of accommodation and other tours or onward destinations. This is because they do not want to miss coming and not getting a spot in Hafiz's tours, which can sometimes be fully booked. After all, rooms can usually be found but Hafiz's tours are only from him alone. They would even ask him for advice on getting accommodation.

As both a value-added service and also to promote surrounding businesses, Hafiz will recommend local chalets, homestays and other proper accommodation, as well as partner's and other tour activities. For example, as part of his passion for conservation he partners with the regional turtle and terrapin

sanctuary and hatchery, and sends or recommends his tour participants to also go there during the hatching season, around May to September.

Since he conducts different day-time and night-time tours, for customers who take both types and have a few hours' wait in between trips, he will recommend surrounding restaurants or *warung* (stalls) to have a meal and relax, especially those around his office as he knows their quality and service. For pre-arranged groups, he will even procure from them to supply local cuisine for their catering.

Meanwhile for visitors such as Chinese tourists who after tours ask about local delicacies, he even knows and recommends places such as star crab or such specialty

eateries at Kemaman, the next town to the north. These personal touches of advice go a long way in creating happy customers who savour the value-added experiences.

As for other tours in the immediate area, there are three other mangrove boat tour operators in the vicinity. Hafiz points out that they are all friends, and HCA invites the other operators to join in and take tour passengers whenever HCA's bookings are over capacity. This opens the opportunity for other operators to share in the cake and even learn more about HCA's content to raise the quality of local products and services for the community's future.

SAFETY AND HEALTH DETAILS, FROM BRANCHES TO ENGINES



HCA, as a tour operator, has over many years of experience amassed a near comprehensive set of detailed safety and health procedures and advisory details for tours and customers. These things cannot be done alone and require the cooperation of all involved, from all staff to community members and tour participants themselves.



Banana Boat Ride

Knowing personal sensitivities, sometimes advice has to be given the soft or indirect way until everybody understands. For example, Hafiz says, **"Pre-tour briefings can be likened to the khutbah before Jumaat (sermon before Friday prayers)"**, where virtues must be extolled on why this or that should be adhered to. Safety and health are given 100 percent attention and so far, no major untoward incidents have happened.

Must-do matters include of course wearing life jackets, no smoking, no flash and even no lights from phones (to avoid light pollution for night tours



that disturb wildlife especially fireflies – the boat or operator has own safety light), no jumping and shaking the boat, no touching anything outside the boat including tree branches as there could be venomous snakes on overhanging branches.

The rules mentioned even include **"no fighting!"** Hafiz related that yes,

tourists can and do fight among themselves, even spouses or parents and children can argue loudly, and commotions could occur. Thus, from early on everybody is clearly told not to argue or fight, and to be considerate of others, let every person on board have a chance to see and enjoy everything. This simple but straightforward reminder usually is enough to keep everyone nice to each other.

Heavy rain can of course disrupt tours, forcing them to be cancelled and refunded, or else postponed. However, for fireflies' trips Hafiz may go and do a reconnaissance check where the fireflies congregate. From there he can usually tell if the rain will be prolonged or will end soon, and if the tour can proceed after waiting. It is this ability that has also earned him the moniker **"Fireflies Whisperer"**.

In fact, if visitors can wait it is actually even better to view the fireflies after the rain, as they are more active then. Otherwise besides getting an immediate refund, visitors who have the time can come back the next evening. On average only 10 percent cancel because of rain as most would either wait or come back another day.

One health and environment matter that Hafiz highlights is the use of two-stroke boat engines, which usually emit a lot of smoke. While not only being uncomfortably smoky and smelly, it is also bad for the health of not just humans but also wildlife including sensitive fireflies i.e. air pollution, plus also noise pollution and irritation.

Hafiz is already in the process of changing his boats from using two-stroke engines to the cleaner and less noisy four-stroke engines. However, he cannot change his fleet all at once as the clean engines are very expensive, and so he is investing in them one by one when his company can afford it.

CONCERN FOR
CONSERVATION
**THE ENVIRONMENT,
THE COMMUNITY**

Hafiz's concern for the environment extends not just for the unique and beautiful nature of Cherating and the region that must be saved, but also concern for the community especially the villagers on a local scale yet also the desire to educate visitors and other people of the world about conservation on a global scale.



But as Hafiz says. "I have only two hands, I can't do everything on my own" and so the smart thing is to network. The first web is the closest, the local community and other boat tour operators, of which he maintains a close relationship with. He will help enhance and share knowledge and awareness on the importance of conservation with them whenever possible, so that everyone in the community will understand the need for the maintenance of the environment. After all, sustainability of the entire environment will help ensure everyone's business survival.

On a wider scale, Hafiz works together with all parties including NGOs such as the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) in particular on firefly conservation, on ways to

ensure that fireflies and by critical extension their wider habitat are well preserved. Hafiz reminds that so many other important wildlife exists there, from the mangrove trees that nurture Cherating's only species of non-synchronous twinkling fireflies, to reptiles, primates, birds and thousands of other fauna and fauna species that perfect the area's natural wonders.

Another important organisation collaborated with is Fireflyers International Network (FIN), about which HCA is also mentioned in Tripadvisor. Besides those, HCA is involved as well with the Turtle Conservation Society of Malaysia (TCS) as part of HCA's wider network of nature conservation.

Hafiz highlights that there is the Annual Fireflies Week every first week of July, with events, exhibitions, talks and tours that help to raise awareness of the importance of fireflies worldwide. Fireflies and such rare wild insects are actually an indicator of the health

of the particular environment. If they die out it is an indicator that the area is increasingly polluted or environmentally imbalanced.

HCA also welcomes corporate events where one of the nature CSR contributions is the tree planting programme at the mangrove forest or similar. Corporations such as Petronas, Shell, BASF with groups of up to 200 people have participated in these activities.

A commendable community offer that Hafiz gives is that OKU (disabled persons') can take his tours free, they do not have to pay for the ticket itself, subject to certain logical conditions as not all categories of OKU are the same in abilities.

Some may need to have a guardian at all times while one or two types may not be practically able to board a standard boat. Nonetheless for those who can, even if a busload of OKU participants comes, HCA will welcome them free of charge.

Mangrove Trees Planting Program



HAFIZ'S CHERATING ACTIVITIES FROM 'I DON'T KNOW' TO NOW THE WORLD KNOWS...

Today, Hafiz's Cherating Activities (HCA) brand is not only one of the best-known tour operators in Cherating, Pahang but is also known around the world.



HCA's fame is recorded world-wide via recommendations in global guide books such as Lonely Planet, as well as hundreds of social media postings from satisfied visitors around the globe. His excellent tours have helped put the Cherating region firmly on the world tourism map.

Over the years, HCA expanded until the company has 10 boats and offer the following activities:



Other activities include:



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPANDING THE PASSION WHILE EXPANDING THE BUSINESS



PROMOTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY, SHARING WITH LOCAL OPERATORS



As both a value-added service and also to promote surrounding businesses, Hafiz (owner of HCA) will recommend local chalets, homestays and other proper accommodation, as well as partner's and other tour activities.

Since he conducts different day-time and night-time tours, for customers who take both types and have a few hours' wait in between trips, he will recommend surrounding restaurants or warung (stalls) to have a meal and relax, especially those around his office as he knows their quality and service.



SAFETY AND HEALTH DETAILS, FROM BRANCHES TO ENGINES

Safety and health are given 100 percent attention and so far, no major untoward incidents have happened.

SAFETY AND HEALTH
100%
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03

BEST LOCAL OPERATOR BRINGS TERENGGANU'S BEST ADVENTURES TO THE WORLD





FROM A SHOP SELLING OUTDOOR GEAR TO A TRUSTED OPERATOR DOING OUTDOOR TOURS

As in many success stories, it started out humbly. Jenoba Trading & Services Sdn Bhd began in 2012 as a shop selling hiking & camping equipment in Jerteh, Terengganu, yet run by a passionate outdoors man who wasn't even from Terengganu. This is reflected in the name; Jenoba is actually an abbreviation of the alumni group Jenoba Old Boys of a school in Kedah. But when the Negeri Sembilan-born owner Mohd Najib Alias arrived in Terengganu, married a local, he fell in love with the state as well. Najib felt that Terengganu had so many great outdoor places that were not given due recognition, nor action.

So, after initially following and learning from other external adventure organisers, in late 2018 Najib took the plunge and began conducting adventure tours, the first from within Terengganu to do so in planned packages. Thus, the rebranding and introduction of Jenoba Outdoor began.

In the beginning, what was offered was in the form of a one-off recreation package taking two to five days involving hiking, usually during weekends or long holidays. This kind of group package only went ahead if there were about 30 participants per trip and thus couldn't be done often as it took time to gather enough participants.

However, that model is not so tourist friendly as tourists usually have their own limited dates that often do not coincide with the tour dates arranged by the company. Tourists also often travel in small groups, so again they could not join the package if their number is too small to justify a customised package.

In order to capture the tourist market, Jenoba changed its approach and created regular adventure tourism packages, where each trip would go ahead even with the participation of just two persons. This enabled tourists to participate in Jenoba's tours even at short notice almost anytime during their travel dates. This was a novel approach for the Terengganu market at that time.





Despite being a newbie in practice, Jenoba Outdoor has made great strides in getting several of their own Terengganu adventure tours established, expanded and ensured a place in the tourism industry and public awareness.

Jenoba has become one of the most active local proponents for Terengganu adventure tourism. "We want to introduce and bring visitors to savour the many nature spots in Terengganu, besides the famous islands. Terengganu has many more adventure places that are fantastic but lack promotion or tours, so we're doing that", says Najib.

“

We transformed our approach from offering packages that were just recreational into adventure tourist packages, in order to increase the demand for our tourism products.

With that, now trips can proceed with a minimum participation of just two people, which of course optimised the company's regular operations. Collaboration with travel agents at the Kuala Besut jetty to introduce Jenoba's packages became the gateway to bringing in foreign tourists to try local tours and expand their stay in Terengganu. Jenoba's hope for the future is for Terengganu to be as famous for all its exciting nature and outdoor adventure offerings, just as its beautiful islands are.

”



Mr. Mohd Najib Bin Alias
Manager

NEW ADVENTURE PACKAGES GALORE

In reality, there are many interesting places around Besut, the gateway district to the popular Perhentian islands.

Within just 15 minutes from the Kuala Besut jetty that links to the islands, tourists both local and foreign can come over and explore the mainland adventure packages offered by Jenoba that will diversify and enrich their holiday itinerary in Terengganu.



One little secret that Jenoba helps uncover is trekking to Lata Tembahah ('lata' means waterfall in the local vocabulary) in Jerteh. Besides the beautiful falls, here the water is a mesmerising bluish-green or emerald colour.

To get there, the guide will lead trip participants through a jungle trail. From the entrance to the waterfall a brisk walk may only take 40 minutes but in practice it's usually an hour plus, because there are so many interesting things of nature to see and learn.

This is where one of Jenoba's value-added qualities come in, the local guides selected and trained will be happy to show and explain about all the natural wonders along the trail. At just RM89/pax this package is fast gaining popularity.

One of the previously best kept secrets that Jenoba has opened up to the world is kayaking at Terengganu's own "Little Amazon"



in Kuala Berang. It's called Little Amazon because it feels like kayaking along the Amazon river but on a smaller scale.

The well-preserved fauna and flora around the river at Kuala Berang make this kayaking package an attractive offering to be explored. Even the daughter of Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (the current Sultan of Terengganu) had tried this activity with Jenoba Outdoor.

Jenoba has made it so efficient that now even just two people or a couple can do the kayaking trip complete with a local guide, whereas previously it required a group of 20. The package begins at 9.00am and ends at 1.00pm. As a bonus, guests can add-on the famous Tempoyak Ikan Baung for lunch at RM15/pax.

As mentioned earlier, Najib wants to promote beyond Terengganu's islands, and Besut is a good place to catch tourists as it is a launch point to the Perhentian isles. Thus, Jenoba has found an interesting hill, Bukit Keluang, with a strategic view to entice tourists, both foreign and domestic, to explore.

Indeed, hiking up this hill is not yet popular or known outside of local knowledge, despite being just 5 km from the jetty and just near the coast. Yet from the summit of this 'Bat Hill', as its name means, one can see both the wide sea to one side and the distant mountains on the other, like a look-out point.

If one climbs Bukit Keluang before dawn then a glorious sunrise awaits. Another great Jenoba offering that was little known before is the mussels-picking package. This is done at a 'betung pasir' or sandbank area between the sea and the mangrove coast.

Here there are two native species of shellfish, 'lokan' and 'kepah' that Najib muses, "Some city folk don't even know the difference!" Well, 'lokan' (mussels) are larger and darker while 'kepah' (clams) are smaller and smoother. There's a technique to look for these shellfish, which the local guide will show how by using, impressively, Jenoba's own made contraption, as well as how to eat it fresh.

To keep numbers sustainable, the guide will advise the quantity limit to be taken based on the season, enough for own consumption, and no bringing the extra back home. This shellfish-picking is actually a delightful outing that the whole family can take part in.

Indeed, to nurture the next generation, Jenoba introduced a new package for youngsters from as young as six years up to 12 years old. Realising the need to educate the future generation, this Jenoba edu-tour was introduced in 2019 with a pioneer group consisting of eight kids.

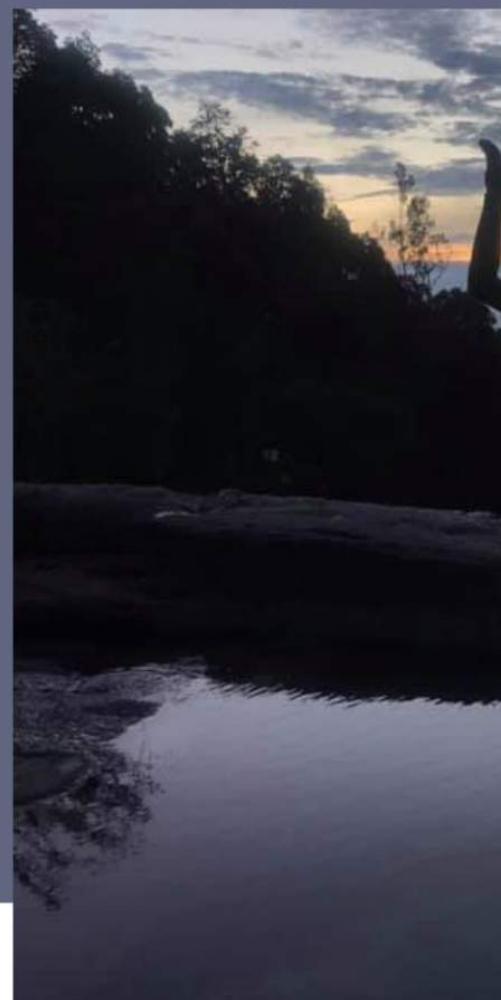
Since then this package has received an extremely encouraging response as the programme also offers exciting activities for the kids including educational hiking, shrimp-catching and caving. The maximum number of the young participants is kept at 20, complete with helmets for each and three guides to ensure the safety of these 'treasures of the future'.

This holiday half-day programme is from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm and as part of the edu-tours, the kids also briefly present to the group about what they saw and learned, and then get a little gift.

CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH THE BEST ADVENTURE, NATURE AND KNOWLEDGE

Najib points out that there are broadly two kinds of tour participants. Firstly, those who are just in for the physical fun experience, the beauty of the place or scenery, and showing off on their social media.

Then there are those who also want to learn something from their experience, to gain knowledge even if they may never use it practically, just for their personal education and enrichment.



"The two types above are also a basic difference between pure recreation activity and tourism services, and it's mostly locals who just want to enjoy the view, take photos and leave. On the other hand, foreigners expect and listen to a lot of commentaries. They ask a lot of questions and want to know everything, from the history of the place to how natural features were formed, the names of plants and what their features or uses are, even how they propagate and grow!", as Najib also proffers.

In any case, this is where Jenoba's guides are trained to be sensitive and to ensure that the clients' desires are fulfilled. For the simple experience and social media types who sometimes won't even be bothered to listen to commentaries, the guides will help ensure that the

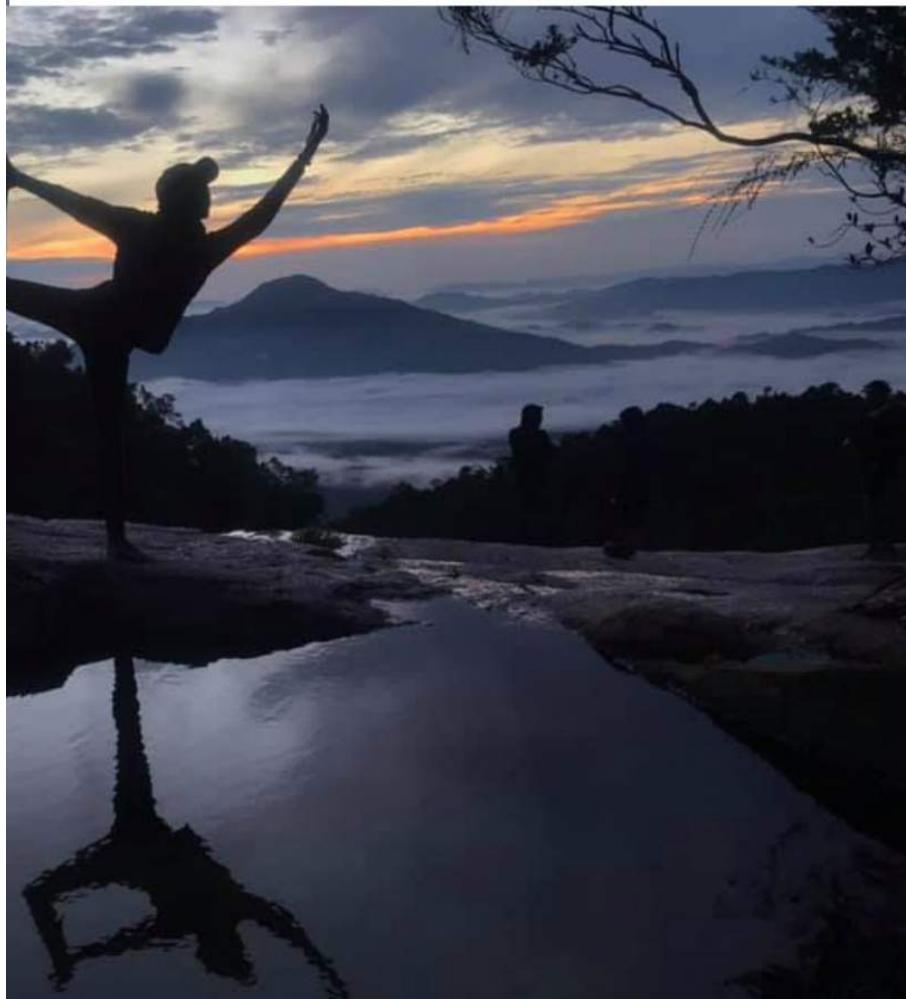
best spots are shown and assist in safely taking the best photos they want. Meanwhile, for the knowledge tourists the guides will gladly show off their knowledge with good storytelling commentary as well.

Thus, Jenoba is selective in having guides who are well-disposed to dealing with different types of people, who like to amass knowledge for commentaries and who have or who obtain storytelling skills.

With advantages such as the above, Jenoba is well-equipped to promote its tourism products to especially foreign tourists who may originally have thought of just going to the Perhentian islands. More intensive collaboration with travel agents at the Kuala Besut jetty is planned so that more visitors are attracted to take up Jenoba's packages and at

the same time increase the number of days that they stay in Terengganu and Malaysia, thus contributing to the domestic economy.

Being a relative newbie in the full-fledged outdoor adventure tourism segment, Jenoba has only begun to scrape the surface of the various publicity and marketing methods. Nonetheless, Najib and the company are quickly learning about marketing via online connections with tour facilitator networks such as Klook, AirBnB, Vacamania and LokaLocal while certainly handling their own Facebook, Instagram and other social media. (FB: Jenoba Outdoor. IG: Jenoba Outdoor. Web: www.terengganuadventure.wordpress.com)



ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES ALWAYS HAVE A RISK; JENOBA'S SOP KEEPS IT MINIMISED

Jenoba is one of the first outdoor adventure operators in Terengganu to have a comprehensive set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which the company devised on its own based on experience, observation and existing industry practice.

This SOP applies to all Jenoba's various packages and was evaluated for its MaTEx certification. It defines all the steps, the how's and why's of each field of duty and workflow for all crew members, especially guides, in the implementation of tours. With this comprehensive SOP it enabled Jenoba to get the certification from MaTEx, which recognises that Jenoba conducts its packages in a safe manner. This certainly raises the confidence among especially foreign tourists who are very particular about this type of safety recognition.

Among the most important matters is the quality and certified skills of guides. Jenoba's stable of guides are mostly locals and have specialised certifications, as befits the kind of outdoor adventure tours conducted. For each package, Jenoba hires different freelance guides according to the best ability or specialty of each, among them having various certifications in recreation activities or nature guiding and of course, first aid.

Najib highlights that in all adventure activities anywhere, even while all precautions are taken, sometimes little falls and scrapes inevitably happen. This is why Jenoba's guides always bring a suitable first-aid kit, always ready and skilled to give treatment, even if it's just for a tour with two people.

For all trekking trips, the SOP calls for safety precautions such as checkpoints between staff at a pre-arranged distance. As an added precaution, during the compulsory briefing before each tour, emergency numbers are distributed including base staff on stand-by just in case an emergency happens, where staff will be ready to inform the nearest hospital and to transport an injured person for evacuation. The ratio between guide and crew to participants is always balanced so that the safety of everyone in the package trip is always well covered.

For each of Jenoba's tour packages, the company will conduct a thorough Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS) to evaluate the risks and formulate SOP steps that should be implemented. The RAMS and SOP are updated at regular intervals or every time a new input emerges.



ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Jenoba Outdoor has built itself a reputation as a responsible adventure company, with various regular procedures and events that form part of its SOP and agenda for both the environment and the community that it is a part of.



From as small a step as reminding all participants during pre-tour briefing of all the do's and don'ts; no touching, no empty talking, no taking or harming anything, and yes to bringing back own trash, to its annual and increasingly popular 'Gunung Tebu Mountain 2D1N Trash-picking Programme'. In this enviro-ritual, participants are charged just enough to cover costs, complete with guide-cook, making it both a responsible and fun adventure while helping to clean up the mountain area.

Local communities are important and integrated with every environment, and Jenoba actively encourages its guides to come from surrounding towns and villages or at least from within Terengganu, while not stopping external talents from coming in.

The company conducts talent searches for guides, and eventually those who show keen interest may even be sponsored by Jenoba to take guiding or relevant skills courses. This not only helps the company to nurture the best local talents, but also returns to the community a sense of stakeholder ownership of their surrounding environment.

This sense of 'community belonging' is further enhanced by even small touches but with a good impact such as ensuring sourcing of local providers for catering, supplies and transport, for example to ferry the participants and equipment including kayaks.

Jenoba is not only a pioneer local adventure operator but despite its relatively small size it has a big heart in ensuring that the environment is protected for not just nature's sustainability nor Jenoba's business survival, but all tourism operators in Terengganu and Malaysia.

JENOBA TRADING & SERVICES SDN BHD

SDN BHD : From a shop selling outdoor gear to a trusted operator doing outdoor tours



NEW ADVENTURE PACKAGES GALORE

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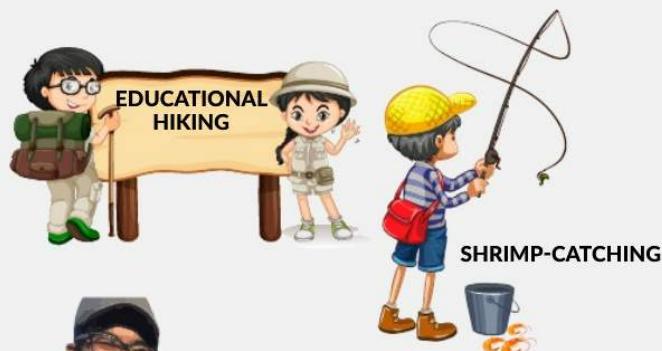
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A MAVERICK TO THE FORE
**IN TRAINING
AND
ADVENTURE,
WHETHER
INDOOR OR
OUTDOOR**





If you're having a teambuilding event, jamboree or just about any especially outdoor activities, do give a go to Maverick Trainers & Consultants (Maverick). Here's a company with a clear objective when it was established in 2019 - to be the best provider of employment teambuilding and training solutions and in line with that, to be the most preferred Adventure Tourism Operator in the country.

Although the company may relatively be a rookie in the field, their personnel's knowledge and experience in outdoor activities is comparable to well-established ones. Many of their trainers boast impressive resumés holding among the highest levels of certification in

outdoor recreation by the Ministry of Youth and Sport Outrecs (KBS). Certainly not least, the founder himself, Mr. Ahmad Shukry Awang is a holder of various outdoor and recreation competency certifications, including the highest at Level 4 Outrec Trainer Certification.

In addition to corporate or organisational programmes, family-friendly outdoor activities are also offered and welcomed with packages that are customisable according to the customer's requirement. The company emphasises on building core strengths and mental toughness to enhance and empower each customer's abilities in line with the group and company's aspirations.

Whilst most teambuilding packages in the market offer simple indoor or outdoor activities (mainly obstacle courses), Maverick offers both indoor and outdoor programmes, especially where the outdoor component consists of adventure activities such as raft building, lake crossing, jungle trekking with ExploRace or EcoRace type challenges, and many more.

All teambuilding package events are held at various sites such as Anani Villa in Janda Baik, Sg. Lopo Village in Hulu Langat and Semenyih Eco Venture Resort & Recreation in Semenyih, for a minimum of 50 participants. However, a customised programme may be done for smaller groups.

WIDE RANGE OF CUSTOMISABLE PACKAGES CREATING ONE OF A KIND MEMORIES

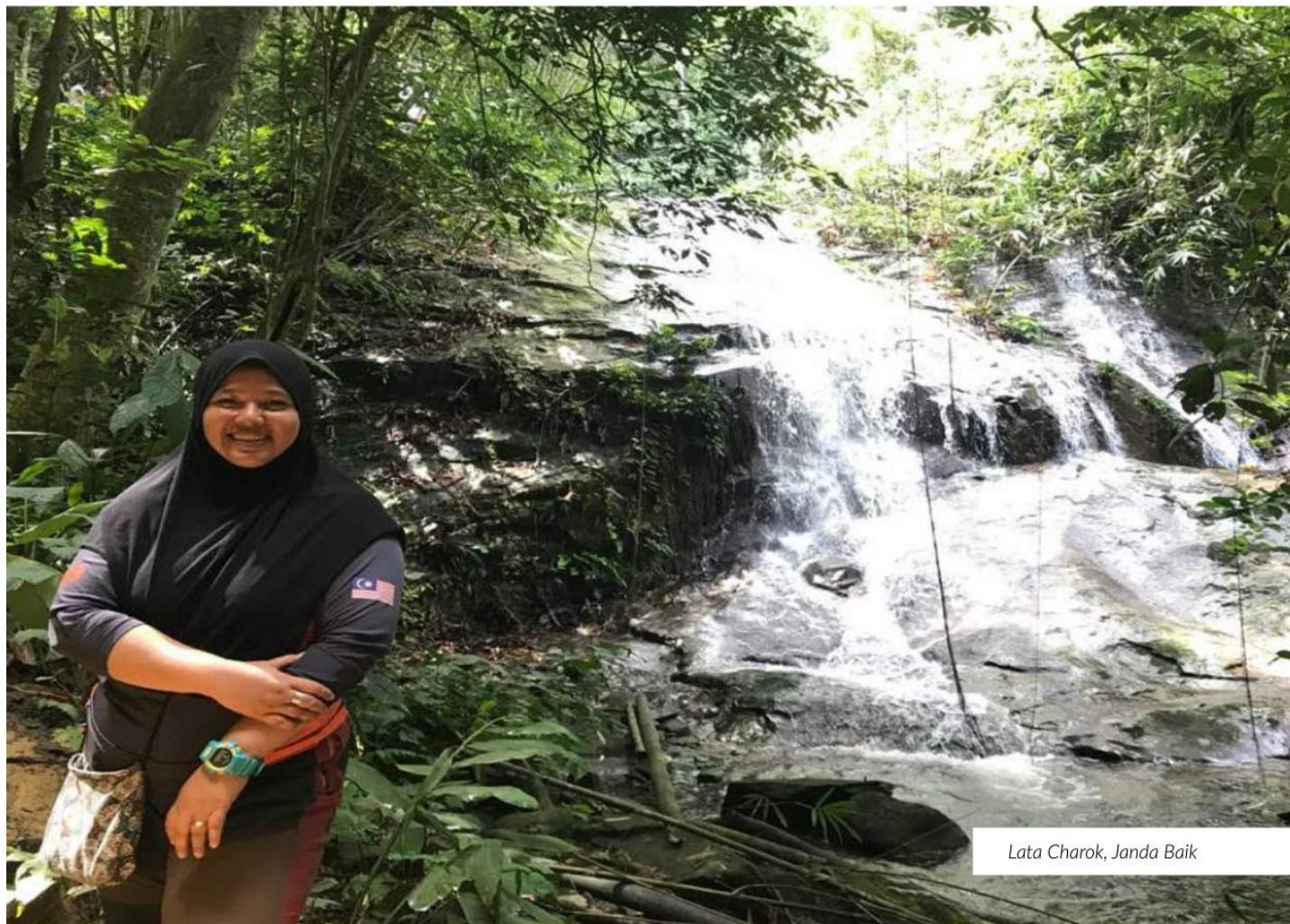
Business diversification is an important factor in a company's expansion, and Maverick has introduced diverse adventure packages consisting of new activities such as waterfall abseiling and rainforest trekking in the hills of Janda Baik, Pahang.

Waterfall abseiling is a truly challenging and exciting activity that is highly anticipated by adventurous participants, as abseiling down a waterfall is much tougher, more demanding and entirely different than the usual tower or cliff abseiling.



Janda Baik is specifically chosen for both its pristineness and its easy accessibility due to the area's strategic location which is only an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur yet out in the hinterland, making it the best retreat even if it is just for a day trip. That's also probably a reason why it boasts 20 percent of its clientele as foreigners, ranging from backpackers to expatriates, who come over to escape the urban concrete jungle.

Packages that are offered at Janda Baik are also collaborations with local venue or activity operators to diversify Maverick's offerings and help strengthen the domestic economy through strategic partnerships.



Lata Charok, Janda Baik



Mr. Ahmad Shukry Awang

Founder

Mrs. Irma Hariati Abdul Muis

Co-Founder

“

The Janda Baik packages opened up a new horizon to Maverick as they offered more diverse activities resulting from our collaboration with local operators. Other than waterfall abseiling and jungle trekking that are run directly by Maverick, the integration of local tourism products help the domestic economy to expand as well.

The safety aspects of each of the products are never neglected, so that also ensures that each product is individually sustainable in the long term. Big thanks to all our strategic partners who each have good awareness on participants' safety and comfort, which really make it easy for all of us to move with the same rhythm.

”



With such strategic partnerships, customers not only get to do jungle trekking with waterfall abseiling, but also have the option of other activities and add-ons including countryside biking, ATV rides, visits to a local Fig Farm, which is becoming a major product in Janda Baik, a Mini Zoo with the petting zoo concept as well as Taman Hana (*also known as University of Life*).

The option to take a bicycle or even an ATV as part of participants' adventures can be coupled with a combination of other exciting activities or attractions. A popular one is a visit to a something unusual in the tropics, the Fig Farm. Here it begins with an educational briefing where participants learn about this Middle-Eastern 'teen fruit plant, its history and see its different species, how its propagated and what products can be made from it.

Fresh figs are available for sale, plus diverse products made from figs. In fact, there is a local effort to promote Janda Baik as a fig plantation destination, just as

Cameron Highlands is synonymous with strawberries, another imported fruit.

Meanwhile, Taman Hana is a truly 'Instagrammable' place with so many nooks and crannies each fit for an IG story, not to mention its University of Life stories.

The Mini Zoo at Janda Baik also provides comfortable accommodation. Maverick can also arrange for a homestay experience or other accommodation around Janda Baik as per customer request.

Participants especially families are sure to have a great once-in-a-lifetime experience with combinations of these activities and stays.

Despite being fairly new, Maverick boasts a remarkable list of clients who have taken up their activities or teambuilding programmes. Among them are IKEA Value Ambassadors, consisting of 25 participants from around the globe.

The great service and diversity of activities afforded by Maverick have enticed expatriates who joined Maverick's teambuilding programmes taken by their companies to return and bring their families for the family-friendly fun adventure outings.

Maverick also conducts special out-of-state adventure trips, for example in conjunction with Malaysia Day on 16th September annually, in which Maverick offers a fully planned Gunung Mulu Expedition package to Sarawak. This however would only be available exclusively once a year for Malaysia Day with limited slots.

Maverick even conducts Digital Detox Camps where for a set number of days, participants including families are taught to shed their electronic communication devices and re-learn communicating with each other and communing with nature.

EDUCATIONAL TRIPS TO REMEMBER

An influential Prussian German philosopher in the Age of Enlightenment, Emmanuel Kant once said: "It is beyond doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience".

One thing that sets Maverick apart is that all of its activities emphasise on the elements of knowledge and experience.

People note that most activities they participate in elsewhere are done without much explanation on the underlying reasons and so on. But with Maverick, participants will emerge from all activities with full added knowledge on the reasons how and why they are done with all the safety precautions and methods.



All the information provided regarding the activities done are explained hands-on by the experienced trainers. This creates participants or customers who are confident and know what and why they do particular things in each activity.

Education is key, where in jungle trekking the trainers will teach participants everything from environmental conservation as well as survival techniques with the dos and don'ts in the deep forest, down to identifying edible or non-edible plants and such survival tips.

This extends to equipment usage, informing on the safety measures and their reasons in a certain activity such as for waterfall abseiling, down to the importance and ways of preserving each activity's surrounding environment.

With this added knowledge, the next time participants want to go for any outdoor activities anywhere else, they are equipped with the knowledge and so the probability of getting either short-changed by other provider agencies or else getting into difficulty or injury through ignorance are minimal, as participants would have learned so much through their participation in Maverick's programme.

COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY SYSTEMS FOR SAFETY ASSURANCE

Maverick has its own comprehensive safety system in place so customers don't have to worry and can follow all safety precautions and procedures with knowledge and confidence.

They have an established Emergency Response Plan (ERP) and Risk Analysis Management System (RAMS) in place, where all these systems are implemented in all of their programmes and activities.

And for every adventure activity, a qualified first aider will be present from Maverick's pool of trainers who have diverse specialisations. Information on the trainers' qualification and certification is made available for customers in case enquired.

Also, for all programme activities, Maverick has set a better than average trainer-to-participant ratio where every 10 persons in a group would be equipped with one trained guide or trainer regardless of how big a group is.

Certainly also, a proper Structured Safety Briefing is given prior to the start of all activities, which educates participants on all safety measures,

the use of equipment, routing, emergency procedures and so on, with all the reasons furnished as well.

Basically, the additional reasons for equipping participants with all these safety measures and explanations are based on three objectives, which are; to trust your trainer, trust your equipment and of course very importantly trust yourself.

Thus, with full safety awareness instilled in participants, the next time participants go to other places doing the same kind of activities, they know what to look out for, what to ask and how to make better judgement.

In times of sudden bad weather or other unexpected impediments, customers' safety is of utmost priority, where an affected activity will be cancelled and participants would be compensated with a suitable alternative.

For packages at Janda Baik, Maverick has chosen its partners well as they all share the same awareness and concern for customers' safety and comfort. They always exchange views and best practices in order to streamline and ensure the best for a safe and sound adventure for everyone. Among the partner highlights:

- Proactive maintenance on bikes and ATVs before they are allowed for use.
- Full briefing on vehicle usage and route expectations for all customers.
- Provision of necessary safety equipment and how to utilise them.
- For biking and ATV rides, a trained guide will accompany each group.
- At the Mini Zoo, clear lines are demarcated where visitors should not cross, and other safety measures.

The combined services and practices have qualified Maverick to be awarded MaTEx certification which indicate the company's ability to ensure the safety of their customers. MaTEx certification will open up new horizons for the company to penetrate into the global market.



AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S ALL ABOUT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

All packages that Maverick offers take consideration of the current touristic preferences on activities whether outdoor or otherwise. This includes the especially millennials' demand for Instagrammable places or activities and these are acknowledged with safety and timing accounted for.



The company also takes feedback from customers seriously to make room for any improvements needed, following responses from anyone who attends for example its teambuilding programmes via either feedback forms or even Facebook page. It ensures that any complaints or grievances are dealt with promptly (within an hour after a complaint is lodged). This then gives confidence to customers on the company and will boost their satisfaction in engaging the company in future.

Social media platforms are used actively for marketing and also to respond to all enquiries on the same day including through messaging applications such as Whatsapp business chat.

In attracting customers to keep coming back or even for new clientele, Maverick offers discounts for early birds as well as value-added bundle pricing strategy.

Each of Maverick's local operator partners in Janda Baik is responsible for its own marketing yet at the same time, they introduce and promote each other's activities to their customers to be included in their customisable packages, which enable cross-promotion to be done widely and entice a greater diversity of potential clients.

For Maverick's marketing strategy the company allocates 20 percent of its revenue for various marketing activities. And to capture the market whether domestic or foreign, Maverick use whatever available platforms including International Business networks such as World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) to also reach the overseas market.

However, Maverick acknowledges that Word of Mouth (WoM) has still been the most effective form of marketing, which helps that the company attends promptly to anything raised by customers.

A MAVERICK TO THE FORE IN TRAINING AND ADVENTURE, WHETHER INDOOR OR OUTDOOR

Maverick offers both indoor and outdoor programmes, especially where the outdoor component consists of adventure activities such as raft building, lake crossing, jungle trekking with ExploRace or EcoRace type challenges, and many more.

All teambuilding package events are held at various sites such as Anani Villa in Janda Baik, Sg. Lopo Village in Hulu Langat and Semenyih Eco Venture Resort & Recreation in Semenyih, for a minimum of 50 participants. However, a customised programme may be done for smaller groups.



WIDE RANGE OF CUSTOMISABLE PACKAGES CREATING ONE OF A KIND MEMORIES

Maverick has introduced diverse adventure packages consisting of new activities such as waterfall abseiling and rainforest trekking in the hills of Janda Baik, Pahang.



WATERFALL ABSEILING



RAINFOREST TREKKING

Janda Baik is specifically chosen for both its pristineness and its easy accessibility due to the area's strategic location which is only an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur yet out in the hinterland, making it the best retreat even if it is just for a day trip.



That's also probably a reason why it boasts 20 percent of its clientele as foreigners, ranging from backpackers to expatriates, who come over to escape the urban concrete jungle.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

With such strategic partnerships, customers not only get to do jungle trekking with waterfall abseiling, but also have the option of other activities and add-ons including countryside biking, ATV rides, visits to a local Fig Farm, which is becoming a major product in Janda Baik, a Mini Zoo with the petting zoo concept as well as Taman Hana (also known as University of Life).



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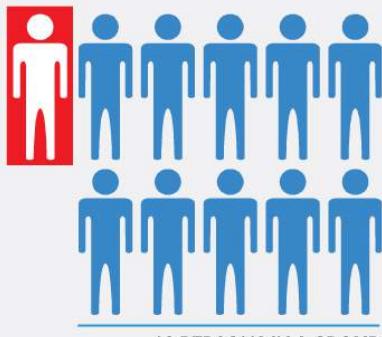
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10 PERSONS IN A GROUP

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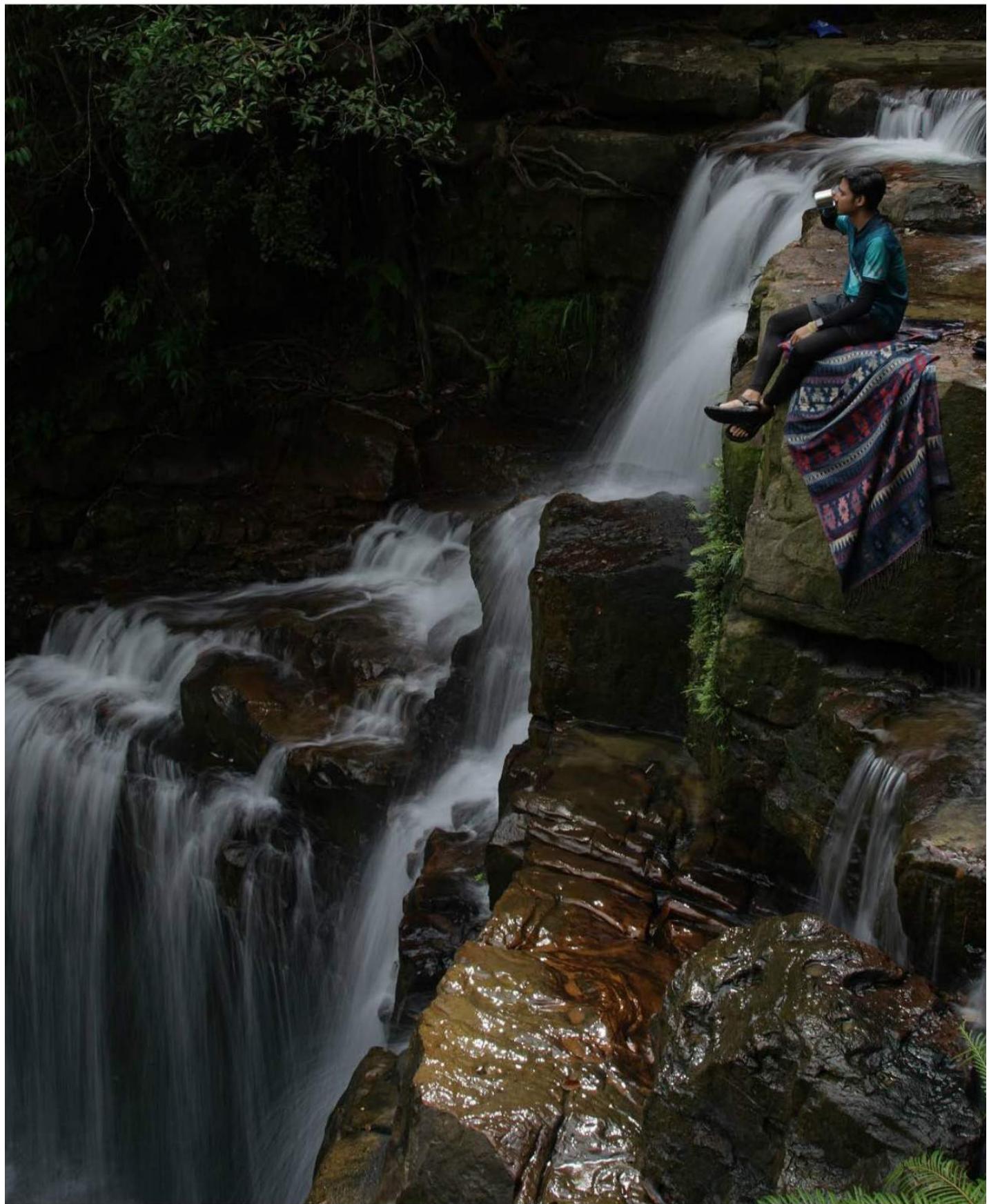


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OHANA MEANS FAMILY, FOR 'FAMILIES' WHO LOVE ADVENTURE OHANA ADVENTURE SPORT





A TRULY MALAYSIAN AND BEYOND FAMILY AFFAIR

Dedicated to outdoor recreational activity packages with specialty in hiking and climbing, Ohana Adventure Sports (Ohana) has that extra touch, which is a focus on 'family'.

After all, "ohana" means 'family' in the Hawaiian language, and Ohana values all its participants and clients together with its crew just like its own family.



Thus, true to its name just like in the Disney hit “Lilo and Stich”, where the human girl Lilo tells the alien Stich: “Ohana means family and family means no one gets left behind”.

Celebrating the diversity of people, Ohana's clients and participants include many ethnicities ranging from as young as two years old to as old as 70 years. Not only that, Ohana also embraces the disabled (OKU) into joining one of its many available packages.

Private trip; Asiaflex company from Johor Bharu at Kem Baha, Kelantan.

Besides open mixed groups, for those who prefer private or corporate trips, Ohana caters for trip customisation according to client requests.

Extending appreciation to its participants and clients, Ohana also provides membership plans where they can be a part of the “Ohana” with further benefits.

Since its establishment in 2015, Ohana has served a whopping 100,000 participants and now averages 16 hike trips per month. Its 20-odd packages all over Malaysia include Mount Tahan in Taman Negara, Pahang; Mount Korga in Perak and Triple National Parks in Sarawak, while its most popular offering is Sabah's Mount Kinabalu in which it serves 500 climbers annually.

Not only Malaysia but Ohana also offers overseas trekking to mountains in Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, China, Japan, Nepal and trips in other countries. Among its popular international hiking routes are China's Silk Road Lanzhou and Zangjiajie National Forest Park.

Malaysians account for 90 percent of Ohana's clientele with the 10 percent foreign participants largely from Singapore and Indonesia with some from Brunei, Philippines and China. Local trips make up 70 percent while the remainder are various overseas packages.

A slight majority at 60 percent of tours are open mixed groups while private or customised packages make up 40 percent. Most of the customers for these packages are corporate or institutional entities such as KLCC, Petronas, Prudential, TNB (Bukit Damansara and Manjung branches), UM, USM and UUM.





“

A wide range of attractive packages are offered to enable Ohana to stand as the most preferred operator in adventure tourism. Towards this aim as well, we have developed our own SOP from long experience and it ensures that the safety of all our participants are our priority. In addition, the preparation of food by our own staff specially to be served to hikers who follow our packages becomes another attraction that makes us different from our competitors. We also operate optimally by running numerous tours per month so that there would be many more participants who would know Ohana or come back to us for other adventures.

”



Mr. Nik Mohd Zawanie Nik Mat
Founder

SAFETY IS PART OF FAMILY

Speaking of outdoor adventures especially with mountain trips, the first thing that comes to mind is; how safe would this be?

With the background and love for adventure, Ohana prioritises safety first among other important matters complete with its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) based on experience.



Firstly, even before embarking on a journey, participants would need to declare their personal health details and conditions in an Indemnity Form that could affect some activities. This will allow the crew to assess and plan the trip and activity requirements as best as possible. The data is stored privately and securely for internal reference and update when participants come back for future trips, which is fairly often.

A messaging group would be created for all information needed prior to the trip such as physical preparedness, hiking gear and other items needed during the trip, with full or additional briefing on starting or reaching a destination prior to the actual adventure.

What if there's an emergency? Don't worry, Ohana crew members are well-trained in emergency situations, ensuring the necessary action to be taken when needed.

Each package takes relatively smaller groups for better monitoring. An average of 30 pax per group would include five crew members that will help avoid unforeseen circumstances such as getting lost in the wilderness during a hike. All crew who handle groups would be provided with a walkie-talkie, where permitted, for easy communication.

All these safety measures practiced enabled Ohana to be awarded the Malaysia Tourism Excellence (MaTEx) Business Certification at the end of 2019. This certification is an important benchmark and selling point that can be used by the company, especially to assure the overseas market that is always concerned on safety and sustainability aspects.

Hidden gems at Sarawak, the photo was taken at Kubah National Park.

TIP-TOP SERVICE BY WELL-TRAINED, SKILLED AND CERTIFIED CREW MEMBERS

Expect tip-top service from Ohana's well-trained and diverse crew members, from the moment participants arrive at the departure airport to the return. A team consisting of 10 full-timers and 30 part-timers ensures that each trip makes participant feel at ease.

All Ohana's crew members are certified and trained in various Ministry of Youth and Sports and other courses such as first aid, mountain-climbing and leadership, to name a few.

The training and certifications ensure that all crew are well-equipped with remedy and rescue techniques in case of emergency, for example, altitude sickness that could happen to some climbers due to lack of oxygen at high altitudes. Besides, Ohana even has certified staff who also conduct internal training for the in-house crew.

In addition, many crew members are equipped with added skills such as cooking, photography or an additional third language.

Some crew members are even fluent in Mandarin, catering to the Chinese-speaking market or where involving China trips.

In fact, fret not for any overseas trip, Ohana will assign from its well diversified crew to accompany clients on their trip for a smooth journey in case of any special or communication needs, which in turn is partly as a reward trip for the crew member who possesses the additional skills such as language and so on.

Promoting truly Malaysia in little but important touches, Ohana provides local delicacies in its all-inclusive packages of six local meals per-day with Malaysian fare such as Nasi Lemak, Nasi Ayam and Nasi Biryani, to name a few. Where needed, the ingredients are even brought and cooked by the crew on-site, thus ensuring the welfare and nourishment of participants are well taken care of by the crew.

The well-trained services provided by the crew always receive praise from clients and contributes much to Ohana's impressive 80 percent customer retention rate.

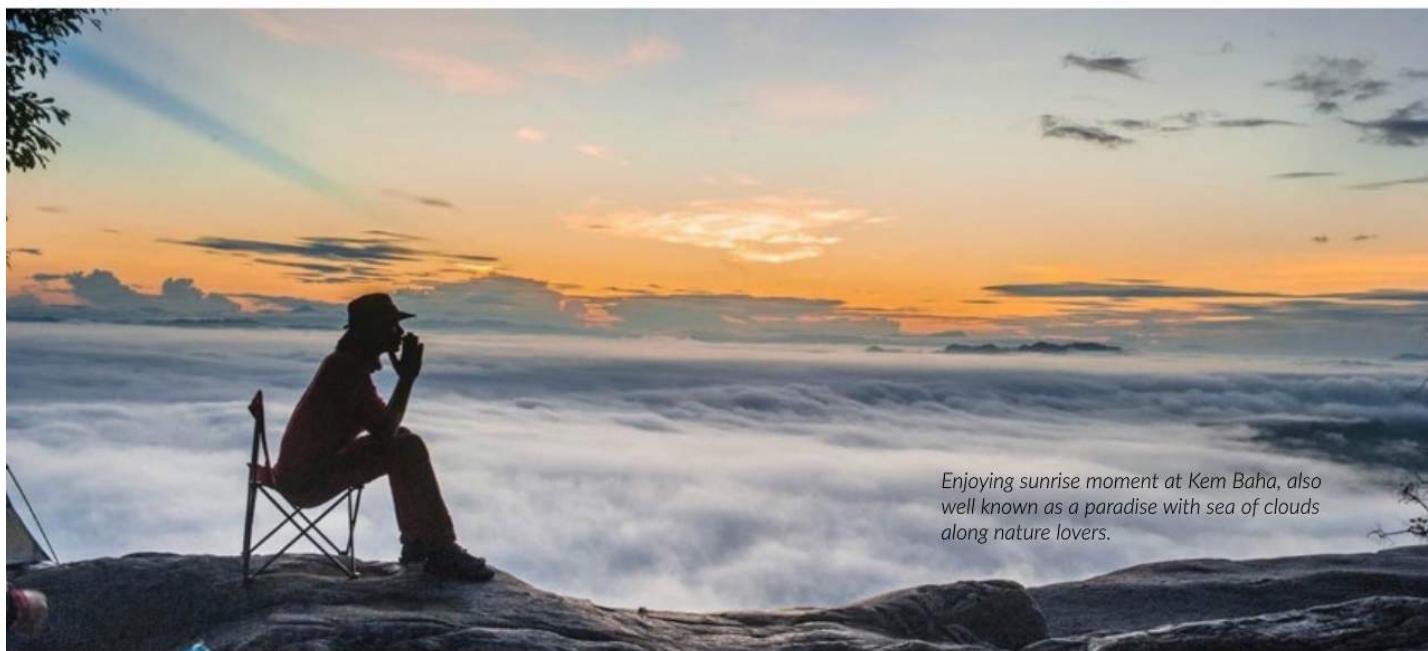
Ohana demonstrates good care of all staff members, where employee welfare is a top priority and well taken care of with, for example, not just EPF and Socso but international insurance too. Even an Ohana Family Day would also be held to celebrate all crew members' hard work.

Standing majestically, Mount Kinabalu located in Eastern Sabah is the highest mountain in Malaysia are our hottest trip and always fully booked among other trip.

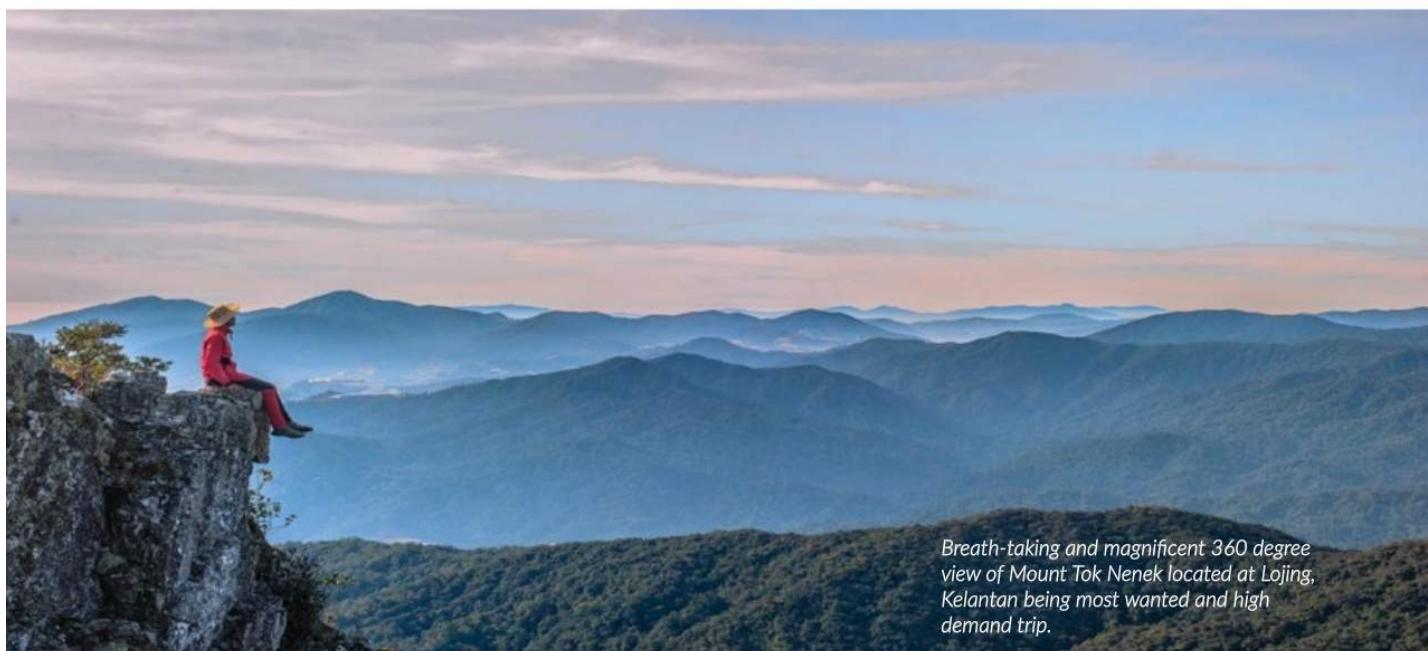


ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNAL EDUCATION

As the company is involved in activities that are nature-related with almost 90 percent in hiking activities in nature or rural areas, Ohana takes obligation in educating its participants on playing their part in preserving the local environment and community. Besides for safety, there's also an environmental briefing.



Enjoying sunrise moment at Kem Baha, also well known as a paradise with sea of clouds along nature lovers.



Breath-taking and magnificent 360 degree view of Mount Tok Neneh located at Lojing, Kelantan being most wanted and high demand trip.

In addition, the crew will also conduct ice-breaking for participants. When participants are comfortable with each other as everyone can focus on mutual safety and environmental practices. Besides that, the ice-breaking and familiarisation helps to unite groups of different backgrounds for their shared adventure.

Throughout the adventure, participants would use recyclable items and try to reduce the use of plastics. Taking serious note also on the guidelines or requirements of areas visited as some would even need to declare items that were brought in and out of the area.

Ohana always tries to involve local communities; where available local guides are hired in each package. Local collaboration is a win-win by creating and sustaining new opportunities and economic benefit for the area's community. Besides that, participants brought by Ohana will usually buy local products, handicrafts and souvenirs that help the domestic economy while strengthening relationships.

MARKETING OF THE OHANA EXPERIENCE

For sustainable growth, no business would neglect the importance and the power of marketing. Ohana's sales depend on family values and beyond. For example, Ohana's success stories are spread via word of mouth marketing, which makes up an estimated 60 percent of its marketing communication and publicity.

The approach taken by Ohana is to conduct numerous tours per month as per customer demand so that there would be many or more participants who would know Ohana. To encourage the high volume, Ohana would continue with any trip even if the margin were small, but fulfilling customer satisfaction translates into good publicity for future business.



The efficient teamwork and optimum distribution of tasks among Ohana crew members despite the high demand maximises the consistent level of quality services. Customers in turn convey this satisfaction to new clients.

Embracing the digital world in harnessing social media, Ohana updates its website and online media accounts regularly with information and promotion as needed to maintain its relevance and meeting user demand. Emails and messaging applications also play a part in disseminating promotions and getting customer feedback.

The company is willing to spend at least 15 percent of its revenue to ensure that content on its online and offline promotional materials are always fresh and serve the latest trends.

Ohana also sets its KPI on for example corporate package sales where its team strives to achieve 20 percent annual growth. The team aggressively goes out and meets potential clients such as recreation clubs and corporate entities to make presentations that would be attractive for them to take up activity packages.

Ohana also does sponsorships of public activities such as the Bukit Putus Challenge, which then creates brand awareness.



Bohey Dulang Island is one of seven islands offered in '7 Islands Tour' trip at Semporna, Sabah. Which is popular attracted by beautiful coral. Snorkeling are included in our package.



GOING THE EXTRA MILE WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY APPROACH

Ohana's crew well trained and certified on First Aid & CPR

Demonstrating appreciation to its clients, Ohana also provides membership plans where clients can be a part of the "Ohana" with further benefits, for example, getting discounts when purchasing outdoor or adventure products at Decathlon.



Collaborating with Touch 'n Go with added benefits as part of its membership package indirectly increases the attraction for customers to sign up. About 500 cards were sold online in just three weeks after this promotion was launched. The signing up helps Ohana to profile their customers better for future promotions. The data allows Ohana to analyse the latest trends that attract their customers for the company to develop new packages.

Normally, for new packages to be introduced and also to consider participants' preferences, key crew members will do a reconnaissance trip to climb up a newly selected mountain to know the conditions first-hand. Interesting photos will be taken to be put into promotional items that will be sent to clients and to be viralled. This usually creates curiosity among clients and helps create future demand for Ohana.

Ohana is fortunate in having crew who are talented in photography. Realising this advantage creates opportunity for the company to provide photographic and videographic services for clients who wish to record their experiences at the right angles and moments, and frees them to focus on safety savouring the views. This goes well with for example Insta-story, while not incurring much extra cost for the company. Indeed, this is great for private packages.

Going on international exhibitions helps the company to seal partnerships with international agents for Ohana to strive in its ambition to garner Southeast Asia's hiking focus right in Malaysia.

In fact, Ohana's ambition is to make Malaysia as both a destination for overseas hikers and also catch those in transit to other places to make a value-added activity stop in this country. Ohana believes that this dream will become reality as there is so much natural environmental beauty in Malaysia that is waiting to be tapped.

Stargazing at Taman Bakok, Sarawak. Included in Ohana's 'Triple National Parks' trip.

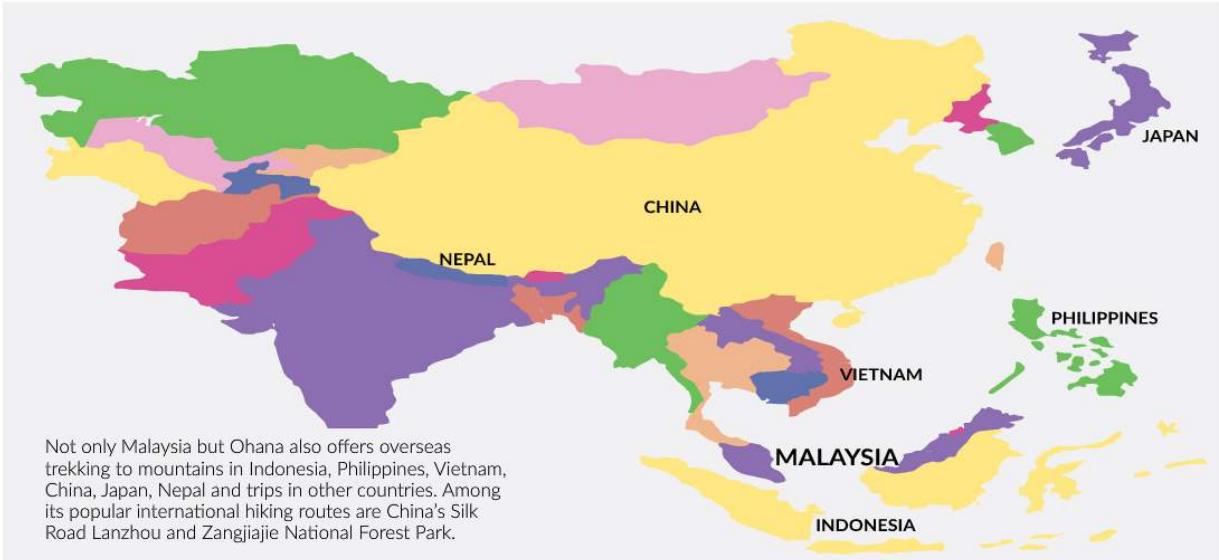


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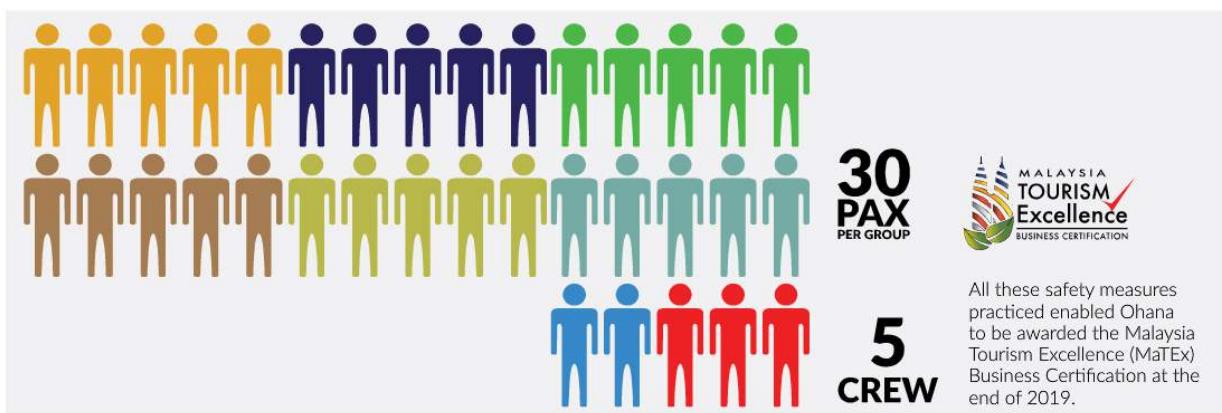
MEDICAL HEALTHCARE REPORT

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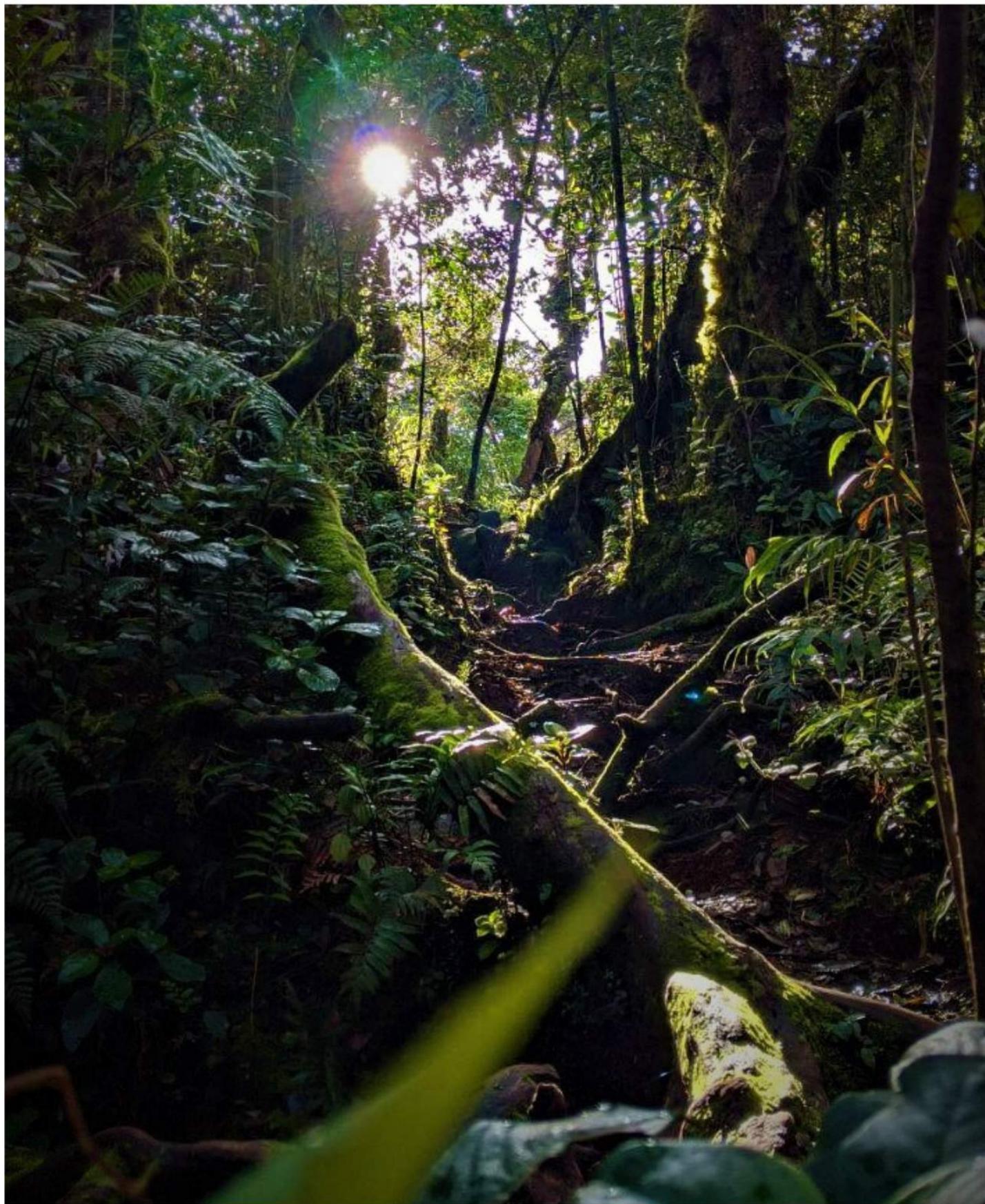
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COUPLE REALISES THEIR DREAM VENTURES, AND THE WORLD ENTERS





ADVENTURE PINS COUPLE'S DUAL SUCCESS STORIES FROM EXPERIENCE & DEDICATION

When husband and wife team, Yusree and Marina, combined their experiences and abilities and established an adventure company called ORL Ventures (ORL) in 2017, little did they know they would make Cameron Highlands their eventual home and adventure base camp. Before that, they had begun as Nature Outdoor Pursuit (2000) and then ORL Green Nature (2010), based in Perak and Kuala Lumpur.

Today, ORL is the only company doing highland hiking adventures that is fully based in Cameron Highlands itself – others are external companies or only having local representation. This gives much competitive advantage to ORL, as they have more specific in-place experience with the terrain and in-depth daily local connections with the people of Cameron Highlands.

With such amassed local experience, ORL offers several hiking packages that are exclusively conducted in Cameron Highlands, including their

most popular package set, which is branded as Inderaloka Trek. Yusree says that the Camerons are like the "Kathmandu of Malaysia", a reference due to Nepal being a very popular cool hiking destination, just like Cameron Highlands.

ORL promotes their hiking packages as a unique or different set of experiences especially for hikers who want to imbibe nature. With a cool yet tropical ambience, plus so many species of flora and fauna that are not usually found wild in other places, these make Cameron

Highlands indeed unique and different. Attractions include the famed Mossy Forest, Rafflesia the biggest flower on earth and scenic mountains through this fourth oldest rainforest area in the world. The famous Mount Irau is ORL's biggest seller, with a day expedition that takes about 6-8 hours from entrance gate to return. More Malaysians have taken ORL's forest and mountain packages than foreigners, a good testament as relatively fewer Malaysians are so adventurous.



“

Hiking in the Cameron Highlands promises an experience with a difference, and that is what ORL tries to highlight. With the cool weather it definitely would be a new challenge for warm-country hikers, while also enjoying the unique flora and mesmerizing sceneries.

The aspect of safety is our absolute priority in ensuring that each and every trip that we conduct will end successfully. ORL continues to expand its wings by establishing and introducing our guesthouse with the local kampung style village home ambience, that to-date has welcomed about 3,000 guests of which 90 percent are from overseas.

”



Mrs. Cik Marina Hamzah
General Manager



Mr. Khairil Yusree Yusof
Operations Manager



Their second most popular package is in fact a mountain that ORL pioneered and popularised from 2016, Gunung Brinchang Barat, where Yusree's team took about two months to establish a 7-km trail complete with signage, reflectors and so on, and this trek takes about 5-7 hours for trekkers.

Yusree organises or even leads packages for hiking, jungle expeditions and mountain climbing. He has one full-time staff and a network of part-timer guides who have helped handle ORL's groups of up to 200 pax. Some trails are simple and safe for his guests to go on their own, where Yusree will give advice and share tips free of charge. ORL also links up with travel agencies for their customers while collaborating for wider packages, for example even including white-water rafting. Thus, it ensures that all ORL's clients and collaborators' wants and needs are fulfilled.

Participant feedback finds ORL tours "very interesting" and "not just a boring walk", as Yusree and his team practice the human touch with their own stories, weaving in their knowledge and interpretation of nature and the hiking environment. About 70 percent of participants are local, the rest foreigners.



THE PERSONAL TOUCH, EVEN IN SAFETY AND HEALTH

Yusree points out that, "the nature and reality of adventure is that there is always a risk or hazard" – if not, it simply won't be an adventure, better take a walk in a flat garden if one is risk-averse. But of course, the risks need to be minimised.

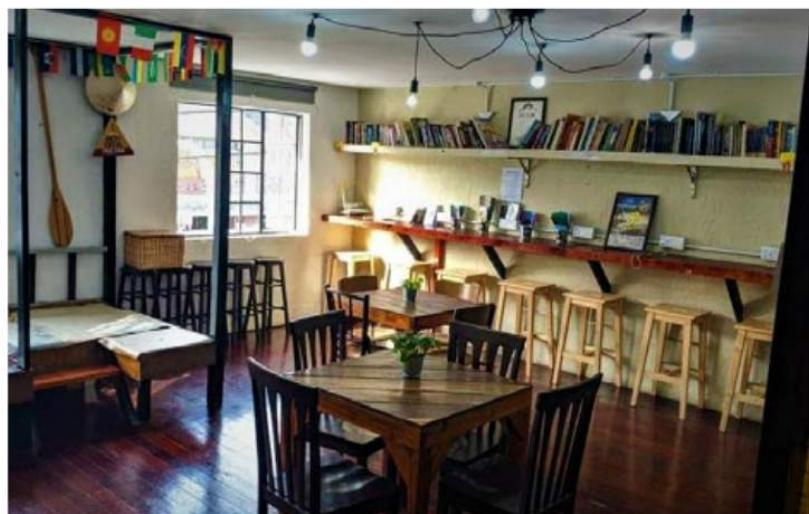
This is where standard measures are a must including the indemnity form, identifying potential health and other safety hazards, which differ from place to place or tour type, and that organisers such as ORL have to know well.



Yusree even does mind-mapping for each tour, personally planning how to manage each possibility. From there the pre-tour briefing is critical especially letting participants know what to expect, the nature of the route, what are the ups and downs and practicalities. For example, ORL has a rule where the leader must always be able to see all participants who are following, while each pax in the line must always see the person ahead – if not, shout! The team also practices reporting every hour or at designated checkpoints to ensure that nothing goes amiss for too long.

The excellent overall performance and feedback have qualified ORL to be awarded the Malaysian Tourism Excellence (MaTEx) certification.

Yusree adds that, "Jungle or mountain hiking is not something to be taken lightly, everyone must be prepared with knowledge, equipment, food, stamina and, importantly, trust for the guide, meaning follow instructions always". Mental preparation is especially



critical, and those who aren't adequately prepared or have doubts should not proceed.

Even the seemingly unnoteworthy lunch pack that they home-cook, with rice and *lauk* (meat and vegetable dishes), is actually important for even just a few hours' trip, as the rice is energy-giving carbohydrate. He relates one old instance where a participant refused to eat the rice and only ate own bread and smoked salmon due to

personal diet-consciousness. Before the tour's end, the participant couldn't walk and was starting to lose focus. Although the tour ended safely after the participant finally ate the rice and gained energy, the valuable lesson learned for ORL is that all participants need to be ensured that they follow every single piece of advice, especially on sufficient carbohydrate intake to last the whole tour.





Other risks that he needs all customers to be aware of include fatigue, dehydration, falls and breaking a leg or other limb, and of course wild animals of all kinds. While he has fortunately not had any such incidences on ORL's hikes, he has known of it happening in others and always needs to be prepared.

Indeed, Yusree is trusted by the authorities enough to be occasionally called to help join rescue teams to look for missing hikers, which he does even though it is voluntary.

ORL is fortunate that the forest hiking entry permit in Cameron Highlands is efficiently easy to obtain right on the spot at the entrance booth. This is one of the critical factors that would make or break a destination's success in adventure tourism, as sometimes visitors decide at the last minute, and thus can still participate in Cameron Highlands.



A COMPLEMENTARY OPPORTUNITY BECKONS, AND A GUESTHOUSE TAKES OFF

As good fortune goes, it took an opportunity doing repeat hiking adventure tours in Cameron Highlands to realise that it made sense for ORL to invest in opening a guesthouse venture in the area itself, where Marina would helm, just as Yusree continues leading ORL's adventure business. As they expanded both their guesthouse and tour packages, the world kept coming. They named this guesthouse Hikers Sleep Port.

For Marina, opening and running Hikers Sleep Port came as second nature, as she had obtained good experience working for several years in the hotel and hospitality industry. Thus, after preparing and opening their tradition-themed guesthouse, ORL enjoyed a complementary dual business of adventure and hospitality.

Eventually, despite having permanent staff strength of just two at the guesthouse and only one in adventure hiking, they are so well run that they have fantastic 2019 ratings of 9.4/10 at Booking.com 2019 and 9.7 at Hostelworld. How do they do it?

It wasn't a breeze. Besides their prior 11-12 years each of working experiences being very helpful, it really required the couple's understanding and dedication to discipline and smart work while developing their guesthouse's USP as a traditional family-style guest pad. Nonetheless, the first one or two months were very slow, and locals weren't picking up, but then many foreigners started coming and the word spread.

So far, around 3,000 guests have stayed, with 90 percent from overseas. Many are European namely from Germany, UK, Spain, Netherlands, France, Italy, also

Singapore (plus International School groups), Japan and Korea.

These guests are from developed countries, where they appreciate local culture, traditional aspects and new experiences better, plus they also read more and take recommendations via media. Still, ORL didn't expect the higher popularity among foreigners, as initially the target was locals.



HOSPITALITY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH THE BEST TRADITIONAL TOUCH

A winning unique selling proposition (USP) for Hikers

Sleep Port is their Malay family home concept. It helps that about 60 percent of the premises is of wooden material, giving it the kampung feel. But more than that, it's also the actual stay experience, where guests get to try traditional Malay village family culture.



As Marina puts it, *"It's as if you're a relative coming back to the village and staying together at the family home!"*. Indeed, just like the extended family 'Balik Kampung', where mattresses are spread out on the wooden floor for bedtime and people sit cross-legged together for home-cooked meals. It's a great USP where foreigners also experience and learn about local Malay culture and lifestyle. Maybe that's why ORL's guesthouse is so popular with foreigners, as it is indeed something new for them.

Breakfast is provided daily, cooked at the guesthouse's own kitchen. Of course, Malaysian dishes are served such as *nasi lemak*, *mee goreng* and even home-made recipe *serikaya jam* to be spread on bread.

The current guesthouse capacity is 21 guests but under the ongoing renovation that expands into a neighbouring lot, it will eventually allow 36 pax in order to cater for say, a busload group.

Feedback is fantastic, with guests writing it as *"home away from home"* or that *"when I entered the door, I already felt like at home"* and even *"5-star service"* (albeit a traditional one). Since the couple is a small family, Marina says. *"with our kids around, guests also feel a family ambience here"*. Indeed, after travelling for months these global adventurers, *"like the welcome homey feel, the traditional Malay breakfast and home-made kaya"*.

Some guests make return visits, and even the kids remember and greet them with, *"Welcome back"*, which makes a huge difference. Visitors from previous years tag ORL's Hikers Sleep Port on social media with *"My second home"* or contact them back and ask *"How are you and your family there?"*

Another important thing is how ORL's guesthouse introduces foreigners to Malay food - and guests love it! Many say they didn't know Malay cooking before, having usually been exposed in Malaysia to Indian, especially Mamak or other foods. The effect at the guesthouse is even better as it's cooked with love for the family to eat as well.

As Marina says, *"We give very personal service, and in the end, we impact their lives"*.

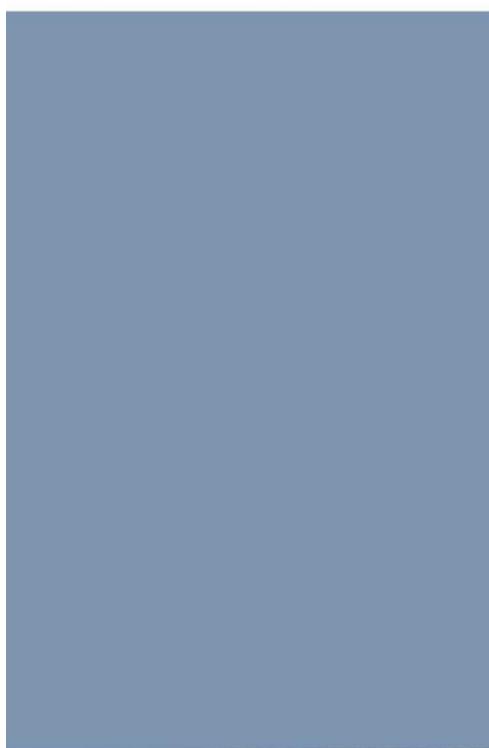


ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

There are lots of other accommodation options in Cameron Highlands. As for adventure tour options, Yusree points out that there are more than 100 companies doing hiking tours all over Malaysia.

Competition is tough, thus healthy differentiation is key for everyone's sustainability.





For a start, appreciation of the environment needs to begin with awareness that it exists and is important. Towards this end Hikers Sleep Port has various environment-conscious features; some obvious and needed, some subtle and unique.

To begin with, cleanliness and hygiene in the guesthouse are a given, and all areas are well-cleaned up with rubbish disposal also well thought-out, with bins sorted out by type. This is of course crucial too for especially visitors from developed nations, who are more sensitive to hygiene and recycling issues.

The guesthouse bathroom areas are designed to be naturally aired,

and even open on one side with a view to the hills while the angle affords privacy from the outside. This lets users have an instant feel of nature, environment and weather; appreciating the breezes and even rainwater gushing just beyond the roof eaves and collecting below when the tropical showers come.

For ORL's hiking and outdoor activities, environmental concern is made aware for participants to practice. Participants are advised to carry back their rubbish such as wrappers, cigarette butts and so on. Yusree admits some people need to be 'psychoed' to do so but eventually everyone understands, and it's a win for everyone.

In any case, ORL adheres strictly to the Forestry Act 1984 and related local environmental regulations; no burning, no taking out of any forest products, no killing of any living organism or even damaging any trees, plants, natural formations etc.

As part of community-building efforts, ORL also has a special visit package to a Semai Orang Asli aboriginal village, where all involved are Orang Asli.

Here, visitors get to meet the *Tok Batin* or headman, cook rice in bamboo, try smoking natural leaf cigarette, swim at the waterfall or also see an old crashed helicopter led by a villager.



WORD OF MOUTH STILL DOES BEST FOR ORL'S MARKETING

ORL Ventures of course has the usual Facebook, Instagram and other presences online, also on platforms such as Trip Advisor and such, where many potential customers look at ratings and comments. This is where ORL's excellent ratings on Booking.com, Hostelworld and so on get it many customers and also fans.



But the best is still Word of Mouth by satisfied previous customers, who tell others or who relate their happy experiences on their social media accounts. From these and other exposures, ORL gets a lot of direct bookings via calls, messages or emails.

ORL also networks with travel agencies wherever possible, even internationally. A travel agency in Belgium, for example, sends small but regular-sized groups of about 14 pax plus a Tour Leader about three to four times a year.

In a way, for small family-run ventures like ORL's, the best is still to focus on providing the excellent continuous personal services for all customers and let that 'speak for itself', as small outfits might not be able to handle very large groups at one go if aggressive marketing is done anyway.

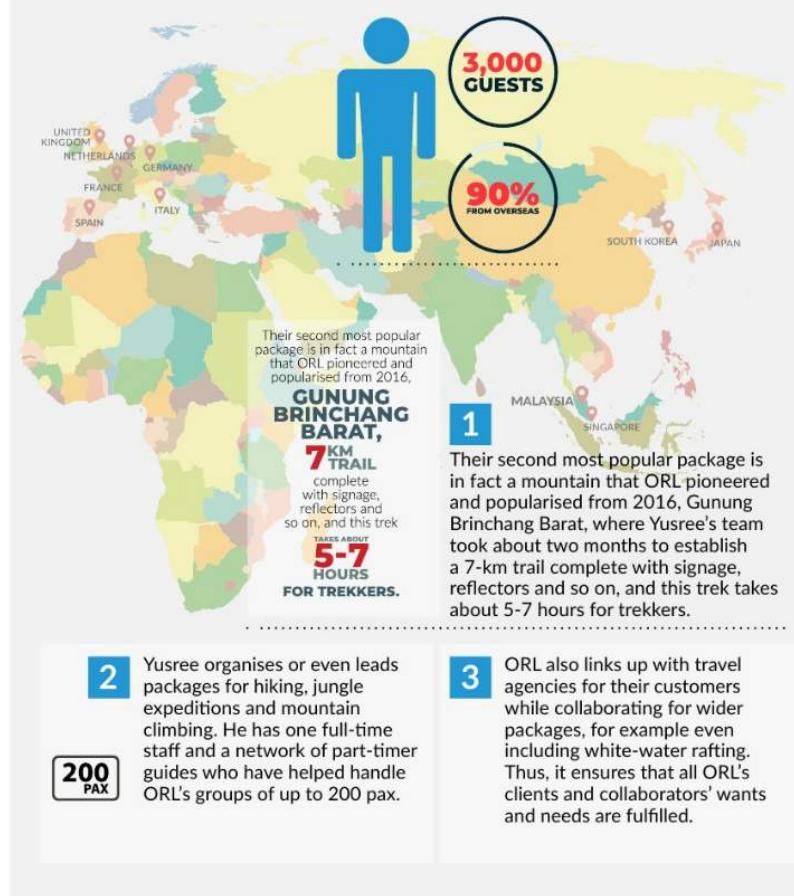
For the future, ORL will be adding in Hikers Sleep Port a related but unique concept in the section now under renovation; an 'indoor camp style'. ORL will be a pioneer for this new guesthouse concept, which was a result of looking at and responding to customer preferences, especially for example local or Muslim ladies seeking a little more privacy due to 'aurat' or modesty concerns. It would be exciting to learn how this new idea turns out.

COUPLE REALISES THEIR DREAM VENTURES, AND THE WORLD ENTERS

When husband and wife team, Yusree and Marina, combined their experiences and abilities and established an adventure company called ORL Ventures (ORL) in 2017, little did they know they would make Cameron Highlands their eventual home and adventure base camp. Before that, they had begun as Nature Outdoor Pursuit (2000) and then ORL Green Nature (2010), based in Perak and Kuala Lumpur.



ORL continues to expand its wings by establishing and introducing our guesthouse with the local kampung style village home ambience, that to-date has welcomed about 3,000 guests of which 90% are from overseas



THE PERSONAL TOUCH, EVEN IN SAFETY AND HEALTH

This is where standard measures are a must including the indemnity form, identifying potential health and other safety hazards, which differ from place to place or tour type, and that organisers such as ORL have to know well.

Yusree even does mind-mapping for each tour, personally planning how to manage each possibility. From there the pre-tour briefing is critical especially letting participants know what to expect, the nature of the route, what are the ups and downs and practicalities.

The excellent overall performance and feedback have qualified ORL to be awarded the Malaysian Tourism Excellence (MaTeX) certification.



HOSPITALITY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH THE BEST TRADITIONAL TOUCH

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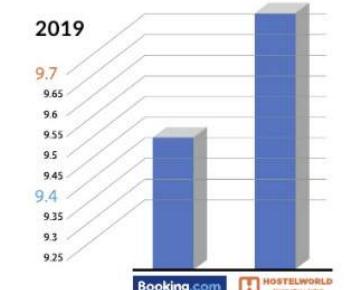


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1984
FORESTRY ACT



As part of community-building efforts, ORL also has a special visit package to a Semai Orang Asli aboriginal village, where all involved are Orang Asli. Here, visitors get to meet the *Tok Batin* or headman, cook rice in bamboo, try smoking natural leaf cigarette, swim at the waterfall or also see an old crashed helicopter led by a villager.

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“G” IS FOR GEEKS BRINGING GREAT AND GLORIOUS OUTDOOR ADVENTURES IN GOPENG





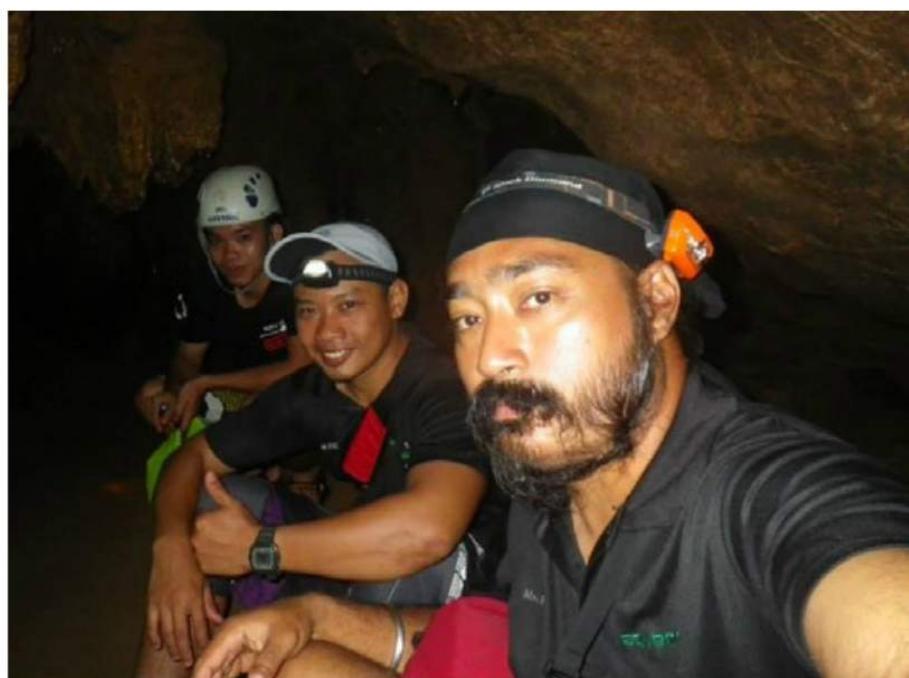
Outdoor Geeks Products & Services (*Outdoor Geeks* or OG) is a company with a unique name and a focused outlook. 'Geeks' gives the impression of 'nerdy' while a dictionary meaning even gives 'unfashionable' but in a fashionable sense. OG is a very focused outdoor adventure outfit run by Mr. Gurnam Singh or simply, "Call me Mr. G", which is where the sound "geek" fits in, where indeed the schoolmasterly Mr. G looks like a great intellectual outdoorsman.

Mr. G has been in the outdoor adventure business for close to two decades but started his first company in 2011, which evolved into OG, established in 2015. Initially Mr. G was doing general adventure tours almost anywhere in Malaysia, going from place to place where clients requested. But in 2016 he returned to a place he had known for a long time and loved, in Gopeng, Perak; basing himself and OG there, and remaining there ever since.

Mr. G recalls a time before when he used to cater to customers' requests to bring them just about everywhere for their adventure tours, as far as even Sabah. It was quite tiring and unfocused. But now, his aim has been to funnel his clients to his base in Gopeng, around this area of Perak where it is blessed with so many outdoor activity choices from world-class white-water rafting and multi-site caving to waterfall abseiling and more. As a result, there are many adventure companies around Gopeng, but each has its own advantages or specialisation.

In the end, according to Mr. G, Outdoor Geeks' USP is its overall customer service and this is seen in its passion. The passion shows up in various forms, from not just personal attitude in treatment of individual customers, but the passion for, as Mr. G puts it, "Love for nature, for the local scene, the *kampung* life. This is more than just a

business; it is a passion for example even for *berkebun* (garden farming) where I have my own home farm in which my family and our guides grow Malay-style *ulam-ulam* (fresh vegetables) and use the *kebun* garden also as part of our package experience for OG customers". From the tours of nature to the *kampung* culture, the passion is all felt here.



“

In the last six years, tourists have begun to know Gopeng as one of the great nature destinations in Perak. Here Outdoor Geeks is one of the local adventure tour providers offering a choice of adventure activities including river, waterfall and cave tours at Gopeng, delivering unforgettable experiences. We are proud to have been awarded MaTEx certification that provides the confidence on optimal safety for our customers. Located just 30 minutes from Ipoh city, Gopeng is one of the key attractions and a must-visit in Perak other than Kuala Kangsar, Taiping and Royal Belum State Park.”

”



Mr. Gurnam Singh
Founder

GREAT OUTDOOR GEEK GOPENG EXPERIENCES

The Gopeng area, abounding with so many nature and outdoor offerings, is an adventure heaven, where OG now runs a modest but focused campsite and base there called The Hideout.

The one-acre plus site has simple and natural structures and facilities made of local, recycled or drift wood and is also fitted with self-constructed toilets, a hall, water supply, electricity and phone charging points etc.





It is at this campsite that OG's activities such as *berkebun* and fish-rearing are done that enable clients to experience harvesting first-hand the village products while also fully utilising the Hideout's available area. With the setting up of such facilities it complements OG in running a range of adventure tourism packages focussing on white-water rafting, caving, waterfall abseiling and many other activities, which can be combined for multiple experience packages.

OG focus in fact has two main segments. One is on experiential learning (EL) which is more for schools and also corporate clients, and more focussed on nature and learning adventures, including custom-made packages that are popular with OG's international schools' clientele, held at The Hideout.

OG has even run programmes here for kindergarten students, which offers a different experience when implementing experiential activities with little kids. Because this kind of package is custom-made, it even gave an opportunity for OG to invite the Orang Asli of the Semai aboriginal group to showcase their culture and lifestyle to the participants.

In fact, the Gopeng area has a substantial aboriginal Semai Orang Asli population and they can also be visited while sharing activities including *menjala* or sustainable fishing traditional style with nets and other experiences.



The second is more on physical recreational adventures, which covers individual and other groups including families, where more challenging adventure activities are often part of the focus. The most popular recreational package of this nature that are in high demand include white-water rafting, waterfall abseiling and caving at Kandu and Tempurung Caves. For groups that wish to have less strenuous activity, OG offers Bum-Bum Tubing, Easy-Peasy Paddling and Sunset Jungle Trekking.

About 45 percent of OG's business is in the EL educational segment that is more for school and corporate groups, and 55 percent on the recreational and experiential for individual or family groups. About 80 percent of OG customers are locals, with a sprinkling but growing number of foreigners other than international school students.



Besides having The Hideout campsite and a dual market segmentation focus, OG prides and differentiates itself on additional value in two other things; safety, and stories. Stories? Rather it is story-telling, and has a lot to do with the

local surroundings, from the skilled local guides who are engaged by OG, to the *kampung* lifestyle and rich natural environment; all of which are inspirations for local stories and experiences that are told and shared in all of OG's tour packages.



This is one of the selling points that tells OG's packages apart from those offered by other companies, where customer satisfaction is optimised by personalised interaction and knowledge sharing. Guides who are skilled in sharing their stories are

well remunerated as a motivation to continue and further uplift their skills and services for customers. After all, OG practices fairly that a guide's salary or fees to a certain extent rely on skill and performance, which is a motivator in itself.

OG only has two full-time staff, but works extensively with freelance guides for its various packages, 90 percent of whom are local or at least from within Perak, with about 10 percent from out-of-state and called in as facilitators or for special purposes. In any case, Mr. G is always 'on the ground' to manage or monitor the trips and tours that take place.

In order to improve services that are offered, Mr. G and his team always solicit feedback from customers live during programmes through suitable approaches so that the feedback obtained from customers is authentic and timely. Besides that, feedback is also obtained through Facebook and WhatsApp, and in future Google Forms is also planned as another alternative to receive responses.



SAFETY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE BOTH HAVE NO COMPROMISE

Focus and passion extends solidly into safety, which is critical in adventure tourism where the elements of risk are by nature always present and the highest standards of safety are thus required and embodied by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).



Yet before that it is obligatory to begin with what is called RAMS or Risk Assessment Management System, a comprehensive document on all risks, which are discussed and assessed for implementation in each tour. It is required under MaTEX for all adventure tourism activities, covering all aspects from safety equipment to site condition to emergency reaction. From here, the complete SOP on implementation of adventure activities will ensure that OG complies with MaTEX certification. With such credentials, it strengthens OG's position as one of the companies that place great importance on safety, and risks are minimised for its customers.

OG practices emailing a comprehensive 'safety practice and packing list' to customers even before they arrive, so that they are prepared in advance with both the mindset and essentials set. Still, some people forget to bring for example their own suitable footwear, and so the company has prepared items such as rubber shoes etc. for rent. A few participants may object and refuse as they do not realise the importance, but with a firm and friendly pep talk, *"You know, this is not for fun, but for your own safety or else..."*, they will comply.



White-water rafting enthusiasts would know that while Sungai Kampar in Gopeng is not one of the wildest rivers and not too scary for those used to rafting, it is still like a roller coaster on water. A few novices are even scared enough to ask not to proceed; but after being reminded that there is no refund, they always go ahead! Nonetheless with all the safety preparations and even a pre-launch briefing that can take up to one hour, in the end participants are usually confident and raring to go.



This is where well-trained, friendly and engaging Adventure guides play such an important role in both safety and customer service. Almost all of them are locals and OG does not hesitate to give extra training on as needed basis for its trusted guides to enhance and certify their abilities and skills. These will depend on their existing inclinations and interests, but can also be either hard skills or soft skills.

This goes for language skills too, and the ability to interact in good English, for example, may not only be good for customer service but may come critical in safety and emergency issues.

For safety too, the maximum number of participants for white-water rafting that is managed by OG is 100 participants divided into three groups, whereas for caving OG limits the number of pax at no more than 40.

The reason is so that the guides can manage all participants including ensuring everyone clearly listens to the briefing. Even though this may incur higher cost in engaging more guides, it enables better personal relationship and attention that in turn ensures that the programme runs smoothly with less likely hiccup or delay.

In fact, this close relationship became a marketing strategy for OG where 80 percent of customers who come came via word of mouth instead of other media.

OG also practices some additional safety procedures that are above industry standards. For every white-water rafting expedition, there's always a designated Trip Leader cum Technical Guide who controls the exact routing and





overall safety measures. Besides the fact that for every raft there are a maximum of five participants allowed with one guide, OG has another Golden Rule that there is one extra staff accompanying in a kayak just in case there's an accident and extra assistance is needed. On top of that, one staff is always on shore (sometimes it is Mr. G himself), standing by throughout the expedition, usually at an evacuation point downstream where there's a clear phone line. In case a medical evacuation is needed it has to be ready and fast – and staff cannot wait from home.

Similarly for caving, which is OG's next most popular package activity, one guide accompanies every 10 pax, plus one extra staff is a must. Even with a minimum five pax per caving expedition, OG still provides two staff guides for the expedition. Mr. G also recalls how OG caving groups long ago were laughed at for wearing helmets when going in, as it was then considered overkill, yet now helmets are standard gear in caving.

As Mr. G reminds us with this famous quote, *"If you think safety is expensive, accidents are many times more so!"* besides the bad publicity that follows.



THE ENVIRONMENT
AND THE COMMUNITY

SHARING THE SAME CONCERNS

Much about sustaining the environment revolves around passion and education, the very same things that are needed in community sustainability.





Frequently as Mr. G points out, ***"It involves changing people's perceptions"***, and that is part of education too. Here again, it begins with explanations; and some of the best ways to convey explanations are in story-telling. Thus, it is critical that the guides must have great story-telling knowledge, skill and passion. With that, everyone from local villagers to foreigners from 10,000 km away will be educated and love it that the caves aged millions of years are there and well taken care of. For each trip and activity, participants are reminded not to leave a single bit of rubbish even at the campsite.

At The Hideout, rubbish is sorted out and organic waste such as food is collected and placed to decompose and make fertiliser. Lights at the campsite are solar. Almost 90 percent of the furniture is of recycled products made by Mr. G and his team who also built the toilets, hall and wakaf shelters.

Community closeness and sustainability are also very much part of the environment, where OG is not just a local operator and employer but Mr. G even lives nearby as part of the same community, sharing business with local suppliers. Mr. G has even known some of the village *makcik* cooks who cater the food for his groups so long and so well that he just needs to tell them which type of group is coming and the cooks will know exactly what kind of dishes to prepare. For example, for *Malay* groups classic kampung cuisine is a favourite, while for foreigners it must not be spicy and for young school children no bony fish, which would otherwise be fine for adults.

As part of caring for the local environment and community, Mr. G wants to educate the world about appreciating and loving the simple and sustainable village lifestyle. He explains, ***"I want to highlight and focus on the culture, the food, the kampung lifestyle, to introduce Malaysian kampung culture to urban Malaysians and to the overseas***

market". A very welcome move indeed.

As part of this initiative, OG's new or revised packages will include local live cooking demonstrations, and even a guided 'cook your own food'. As part of the experience, guests will also be taught basic home farming, where they come early before their expedition, collect fresh ingredients such as *ulam-ulam* mixed salads for their post-tour lunch, or also have mini home-farm activities learning how to plant *ulam kampung*.

There are so many ways to enjoy and sustainably partake of the nature, the community and the lifestyle of Gopeng and its surrounding environment, which OG brings to the world in its packages.



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**SAFETY EQUIPMENTS**

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**EXPERIENCE
AND SKILLS
DELIVER THAT
“MAGIC BLEND”
ADVENTURE
PEARL ISLAND
ADVENTURE**





ONE MAN, ONE COMPANY ON THE GO, YET NOT JUST A ONE-MAN SHOW

Rare indeed it is that one finds one man, with a relatively new event and adventure outfit hardly bigger in staffing than himself, achieve so much in so short a time. But that is the apparent and amazing achievement of Azmansyah Osman, nicknamed Syazman, and his event management company Pearl Island Adventure (PIA), which only began full operations in March 2017.



Syazman does so many activities under PIA that it makes one dizzy just thinking of them all, and will take a whole page just to list out and describe all the 30-odd related businesses and events or adventure packages that he and PIA cover.

He has in fact four general business activities, under each of which are grouped many particular offerings or packages, several of which can be ongoing at the same time. These four basic aspects are event management, training, general outdoor activities and finally, specific adventure packages.

PIA's actual activities on any given day can range from as big as managing a huge running sports event of several hundred participants to training university students, from

island or coral adventure packages to as small as swimming lessons for a kids group; all of which are under PIA's management. Yet by Syazman's own admission, his company barely has just another staff member, with him handling all PIA's offerings.

PIA is based in Penang, 'the Pearl of the Orient', which was the inspiration for the nama Pearl Island. Many of PIA's activities are based at KEDA Resort, a full-fledged adventure camp in Kedah, as it has all the amenities with various accommodation types plus diverse outdoor and indoor adventure games and facilities.

PIA carries out motivation, leadership, team-building and survival courses here for various groups and ages. Cooperation with

KEDA Resort Adventure Camp is one of the strong strategies of using an established and equipped organisation, which helps optimise the capacity and complement the capability of both parties.

Although so many activities are offered, team building and leadership camp are among the popular programmes that always have strong demand especially from both government and private sectors. Indeed, something close to Syazman's heart is training with a focus on team-building and leadership courses, to build a better society for the future, especially for the younger generation. PIA conducts such programmes at several levels ranging from school groups and university bodies to corporate entities.



Mr. Azmansyah Osman
Manager

“

To flourish, PIA needed to expand by offering diverse and attractive packages, from organising leadership and teamwork programmes to event management, while the newest is with adventure tourism products. To further strengthen the company's position, a concerted effort to qualify for MaTEx certification was made and PIA became one of the first local operators who succeeded in being awarded this recognition. This success is largely due to the strong SOP that the company has developed, which ensures all the safety and efficiency aspects for our clients that of course also ensure our clients' satisfaction.”

”



Getting the confidence of numerous customers, including repeat clients, to continuously conduct team-building and leadership programmes is certainly something to be proud of for PIA, which fits the spirit if not quite the size a small-medium enterprise or SME.

But of course, there is a working secret to all this. The first is nothing less than personal drive, a background in accountancy, economics and management, followed by years and years of consummate personal experience and accumulated skills in business - over 10 years, to be more precise.

As the owner, Syazman has equipped himself and PIA with a plethora of both hard and soft skills for leadership and team-building, from certification in programme management and recreational safety to public speaking, training and orienteering.

SUCCESS WITH A PROUD SPIRIT AND A WORKING SECRET



The second is, as could be guessed, having great partners in a business network that are carefully chosen for their own quality offerings, skilled hands and above all, mutual and complementary understanding and loyalty.

It is at once an age-old way of thinking, but at the same time a new normal in this trend of the rising use of networking, where individuals and small groups leverage on each other to achieve greater things that each partner could not on its own. These partners range from companies and service providers that help furnish PIA's event services or packages, all the way to trained and experienced individuals as reliable add-on event handlers, trainers, guides and others.

In all the above, maintaining a good relationship and mutual support is the critical key to long-term business sustainability.

A most impressive achievement was PIA's successful management of a running event in Sungai Ara, Penang. PIA was awarded the responsibility by Malaysia Event & Printing (MEP21) to manage this

entire major event, which involved 600 participants; from getting all the participants right up to handling the whole event until completion.

PIA collaborated with more than ten companies or agencies as strategic partners to ensure that every aspect of the program was implemented successfully. For example, to ensure the safety and security of all participants, the Police, RELA, ambulances and medical teams were all prepared and present throughout the event.

PIA had also been well-prepared with a comprehensive checklist as a master reference for all parties and agencies involved, for monitoring and implementing purposes.

While most of PIA's events are within Malaysia, some are also of international nature such as team-building and family day at Hatyai, Thailand; organised trips to Satun, Krabi, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and others, and that is also where PIA gains some of its foreign customers of about five percent, including expatriates and international schools, with the bulk

95 percent being Malaysian clients. PIA's youngest participant so far was seven years old, and there is no particular age limit with health precautions taken.

All the above has led to Pearl Island Adventure being awarded Malaysia Tourism Excellence (MaTEx) certification, giving Syazman and PIA the recognition they deserve, which will boost their attraction for foreign customers as well as their good existing local market.

This MaTEx award also goes to show that PIA is an adventure operator that prioritises clients' safety by complying with all SOP requirements that have been carefully developed by PIA itself, which covers all its programmes such as Royal Belum Exploration, Kayak Expeditions (White Water/Sea), Flying-Fox, Zipline, Abseiling, Urban Adventure, Island Tour & Island Hopping, Jerai Geopark Tour and Pulau Songsong Tour. PIA displays the MaTEx certificate logo on its brochures to promote and to raise the confidence of customers for their product offerings.



ACTIVITIES UPON DIVERSE ACTIVITIES, BUT SAFETY AND HEALTH UPON ALL

Having many things on PIA's plate at one time means that Syazman needs to run a tight ship, and to do that successfully means having a good set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

Indeed, it was one of the first items looked into when the company began. In fact, there are particular SOPs or even sub-SOPs for different parts of PIA's business, to make sure that all aspects and risks are taken care of for each type of activity.



For all events, and in fact especially for the outdoor programmes and adventure packages, the trainers or guides need to be very well-trained and certified in especially safety and health aspects, to ensure that besides giving participants a good and rewarding time they also get it in as safe and hale conditions as possible. PIA not only brings first aid equipment in every programme implemented, but even every guide appointed is also a trained first aider.

Partners of all kinds, often times, play a critical role that is sometimes unappreciated even though they are "in front of your eyes". Syazman points out that these are for

example, in all his major outdoor events, the uniformed forces including the Police, Civil Defence, Fire Department and also formal medical personnel from the hospital or the Red Crescent.

Many other event managers take these well-trained groups for granted, but Syazman considers and acknowledges them as not only special but crucial for the success of his, and all, events. He takes good care that his relationship with them is close, cordial and correct all the time. Their contributions in safety and health for, say, marathons, fairs or other sports and mass events, and even outdoor or adventure packages

are potentially and literally life-saving, Syazman considers them full partners, treating all in their ranks with the same respect for each of their efforts.'

PIA also conducts Customer Satisfaction Surveys at the completion of every programme in order to improve programme quality. One of the improvements that came about from such customer feedback was the introduction of interesting games during team-building programmes, and also offering better accommodation choices for participants.

ACTIVITIES GEARED FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, THE COMMUNITY AND CONSERVATION

Syazman is passionate about promoting slightly lesser known but interesting local, especially environmental, destinations of international potential. These are part of his efforts for recognition and benefits for the particular environment and local communities of those areas or places.



They include Perak state's Royal Belum Forest, Kedah state's UNESCO-recognised Jerai Geopark, as well as Pulau Songsong and surrounding islands, plus importantly the coral propagation efforts in the coastal waters. PIA has established adventure tour packages to all the above-mentioned places and efforts in collaboration with tour partners.

Indeed, in each of the packages PIA has also established relationships with local service providers, individual guides, instructors or other personnel, not to mention restaurants or catering for group tours, as part of mutual community support efforts.

PIA also incorporates local cultural elements whenever possible in its team-building events. For example, in its team-building programmes that use the Explorace format in Penang, PIA uses the Penang 'Hop On Hop Off' (HOHO) bus, specifically choosing routes through the island's heritage area for stops and culture-related assignments.

On a similar note, for PIA's own Kedah tours the itinerary will include historic or cultural places and local foods, handicrafts and so on, such as in the adventure package to Pulau Songsong incorporating local places in Kedah's Yan district.

Syazman's dream is for PIA to become an established 'One-Stop Event Centre' for Malaysia and beyond. He adds, "PIA sees itself fulfilling clients' needs by providing complete services, including creative works, inculcating positive value and at the same time putting safety and health in priority while conserving our nature always."



PEARL ISLAND ADVENTURE ONE MAN, ONE COMPANY ON THE GO, YET NOT JUST A ONE-MAN SHOW

Rare indeed it is that one finds one man, with a relatively new event and adventure outfit hardly bigger in staffing than himself, achieve so much in so short a time. But that's the apparent and amazing achievement of Azmahsyah Osman, nicknamed Syazman, and his event management company Pearl Island Adventure (PIA), which only began full operations in March 2017.



SUCCESS WITH A PROUD SPIRIT AND A WORKING SECRET

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600
PARTICIPANTS

2

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5% FOREIGN CUSTOMERS | 95% EXPATRIATES AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

3

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ISLAND TOUR & ISLAND HOPPING

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A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY FROM PLANTATION TO AGRO-RESORT TO ECO-RESORT



This place could have just stayed as a quiet sleepy 80-acre plantation, churning out normal commodities such as palm oil for the normal market like many other normal plantations. Instead, since opening its doors initially as an plantation/agro-resort in 2015, it has now become the most happening eco-resort in Lahad Datu and even eastern Sabah.

This is largely due to just one lady, Puan Jessica Reyes, and her large family who run this tranquil yet vibrant establishment. She and her family's commitment to creating a successful cooperative and community-based eco-resort, one of the few in the east coast of Sabah, has also helped raise Lahad Datu's reputation as a fresh and fabulous tourist destination.

Before Pulau Buta Eco-Resort (PBER) was opened, there were hardly any other options for full-fledged nature or green-based activity places to stay in the Lahad Datu region. Thus, PBER captured a timely slice of a market and place that was ready and needy for such an entity. Indeed, PBER is the only such tourism site and product operator that is fully certified in Lahad Datu.

Today, PBER is the local go-to destination for all kinds of events, from a family day gathering to school kids camping or university students learning and corporate retreat glamping.

This eco-resort offers almost every type of eco-accommodation from chalets and dorms to campgrounds to collaborate with village homestays. The chalets and dorms can accommodate up to 50 guests at a time, while the campsite has been furnished with bathrooms, a hall and a *surau* to enable a full range of group activities for more people. Whether it is for just a small holiday getaway or a mass gathering of 300 people, PBER can cater and has catered to all group types well.

“

I believe that Pulau Buta Eco Resort has a huge potential as a premier tourism product in Lahad Datu. With its huge 80-acre area allowing for large gathering activities that have been furnished with necessary facilities, plus our clean river and sea fronts that are also natural attractions - all of which we are proud of. We have gradually introduced various activities for visitors to learn, benefit and have fun with the surrounding environment. We also update or enhance our safety and security procedures every year as one of the ways to ensure and raise the confidence and satisfaction of our customers.

”



Mrs. Jessica Reyes
Manager



SO MANY ATTRACTI0NS TO FOCUS ON AT PULAU BUTA ECO-RESORT

Much more than just a plantation with agro-activities,

PBER boasts a wild river, a wide beach, mangroves, food-growing gardens and a variety of natural flora and fauna befitting the name 'eco-resort'.

Activities that can be done at the river include eco-managed fishing, where visitors are permitted to bring the fish out or also practice catch and release, a guidable river cruise at the mangrove areas to view the native habitat that needs as little as just 15 minutes for those in a hurry, and for groups there is the exciting water sport race using boats.

At the beach it is more for family and group activities, where PBER has built four shelters that can be used for barbecuing, also there is kayaking and even banana boat rides.

Families and friends can even pitch their own day tents at the beach, making it a great choice for family and group gatherings. The fee is kept very low at just RM1 per person and is meant for overall cleanliness maintenance.

PBER also has a café serving an increasingly popular afternoon tea-time with local *kuih* or snacks, with the option of enjoying dining outdoors while admiring the shady log trees. Catering services are also provided as an expected business diversification to complete and complement the resort operation. Using also the fresh ingredients from the resort area itself, PBER offers a wide menu for visitors and programmes whether for camping, meetings and weddings.

Not forgetting local culture; there are folk music sing-alongs and even traditional dance sway-alongs as well as handicraft offerings, all of which are available at PBER's café.

All these activities make PBER one of the most attractive places to visit and stay in Lahad Datu. It is like a centre of activities for the region, serving the people while also having a captive market. After all, the region is home to a large set of Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) oil palm plantation schemes, named Sahabat 1 to 55. With that, there are related schools, institutions and such that serve the planters' families and communities. Whenever all these entities need to have a venue to congregate and do events and activities, PBER is the place of choice.

Thus, whether it is for a wedding or a scouts outing, any corporate meeting or team-building, PBER is always ready to serve the regional community, and even further afield, PBER has also hosted university students or faculty from UMS of Kota Kinabalu and UPSI of Perak for their research and thesis studies, since it has so many nature and plantation aspects to study.



ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF BOTH THE ENVIRONMENT AND VISITOR SECURITY

PBER has also been very proactive in ensuring its best practices and services to customers through honestly and carefully listening to user feedback that it receives, and also by going through a rigorous certifying process until achieving Malaysia Tourism Excellence (**MaTEx**) Business Certification. This applies to all aspects from security to environmental scrutiny.



Madam Jessica stresses that she and her team leaned so much from the MaTEx certification process, especially in aspects of safety, security and sustainability. She explains, "After I came back from the MaTEx training, we followed all the points and requirements. From putting up signboards around our sites stating needed alerts and advisories such as for child safety, to preparing and designating emergency congregating spaces.

As for eco-friendly practices, we have initiated new tree-planting or replanting from bamboo to acacia species, and many other activities. All thanks to MaTEx. We really want to be a true 'green earth' eco-resort."

Through the related Tourism Productivity Nexus (TPN) network that was organised by Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) designed specifically for tourism industry players, Madam Jessica invested in a group expedition to China for both marketing and promotion as well as for study visits, and found it very eye-opening on how similar situation tourism entities there practice communal self-sufficiency from as small as vegetable gardening to packaging local cultural offerings. She returned from China with renewed vigour on how to improve PBER, creating new sustainability initiatives such as own food-growing and bamboo-nurturing, to repackaging a new spirit into local

traditional performances such as the 'kulintangan' xylophones and the Bajau Bangini 'igal-igal' dance as part of PBER's eco-cultural attractions.

Most importantly, Madam Jessica, her family and managers know that they have an ecological treasure trove which needs to be managed well and sustainably. They also know that they have a responsibility for the environment and community, thus they ensure that a good relationship is established where all enjoy the benefits of eco-tourism. These include procuring through local suppliers and giving employment to or collaborating with kampung folk for homestay and village tourism activities.



A FOCUS ON EXPANSION **FROM LOCAL TO GLOCAL**

As mentioned how PBER is more of a local market establishment, Madam Jessica is aware that in the long run, they need to widen their customer base by both looking for new offerings and also new market openings. Thus, she and her team are always on the lookout for new attractions and improvements.

That is how they found that they also have the trendy 'sky mirror' beach section, where people can be photographed doing all sorts of wacky things on a glassy water surface mirroring the open sky above.

Again, this is something that also expands Lahad Datu's local attraction.





On widening the eco-resort's visitor base, PBER's packages are being expanded and reformulated to entice different groups from other parts of Malaysia and beyond into the overseas market. PBER has also invested in new amenities such as event furniture, tents and accessories that will make them more cost-efficient as they accept more or bigger groups of visitors.

Madam Jessica also acknowledges that they need to ensure that their pricing is attractive and value-for-money, while leveraging on all the advantages that PBER's site and services have to offer. Indeed, by international standards PBER's pricing is very affordable with for example, camping rates as surprisingly low as RM1 per student for school groups. While for fishing, their catch can be cooked taken right from the fishing rod - it cannot get any fresher than that.

This means that they will have to widen their marketing and promotion efforts beyond just their current Facebook or related social media, and also their signature flip-fan brochure which they distribute for promotion, but get into more sophisticated methods of publicity and partnerships. Thus, despite the current achievement with PBER's premier position in Lahad Datu tourism, there is much more to be done.

As Madam Jessica stresses, "*Biar susah-susah dulu, biar ikut semua peraturan dan keperluan, dari situ nanti pasti ada jalan mencapai kejayaan*", meaning "let's work hard first, let's follow all the regulations and requirements, from there it will definitely lead to the road of success".





PULAU BUTA ECO TOURISM SDN BHD

A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY FROM PLANTATION TO AGRO-RESORT TO ECO-RESORT

THIS ECO-RESORT OFFERS ALMOST EVERY TYPE OF ECO-ACCOMMODATION

The chalets and dorms can accommodate up to

50 GUESTS AT A TIME



chalets and dorms to campgrounds to collaborative village homestays.

The campsite has been furnished with bathrooms, a hall and a *surau* to enable a full range of group activities for more people. Whether it is for just a small holiday getaway or a mass gathering.

SO MANY ATTRACTIONS TO FOCUS ON AT PULAU BUTA ECO-RESORT

River cruise at the mangrove areas to view the native habitat that needs as little as just 15 minutes for those in a hurry, and for groups there is the exciting water sport race using boats.



Plantation with agro-activities.



Fishing



A FOCUS ON EXPANSION FROM LOCAL TO GLOCAL

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RM1 PER STUDENT



ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF BOTH THE ENVIRONMENT AND VISITOR SECURITY

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FULFILLING THE DESIRE FOR NATURE AND ADVENTURE

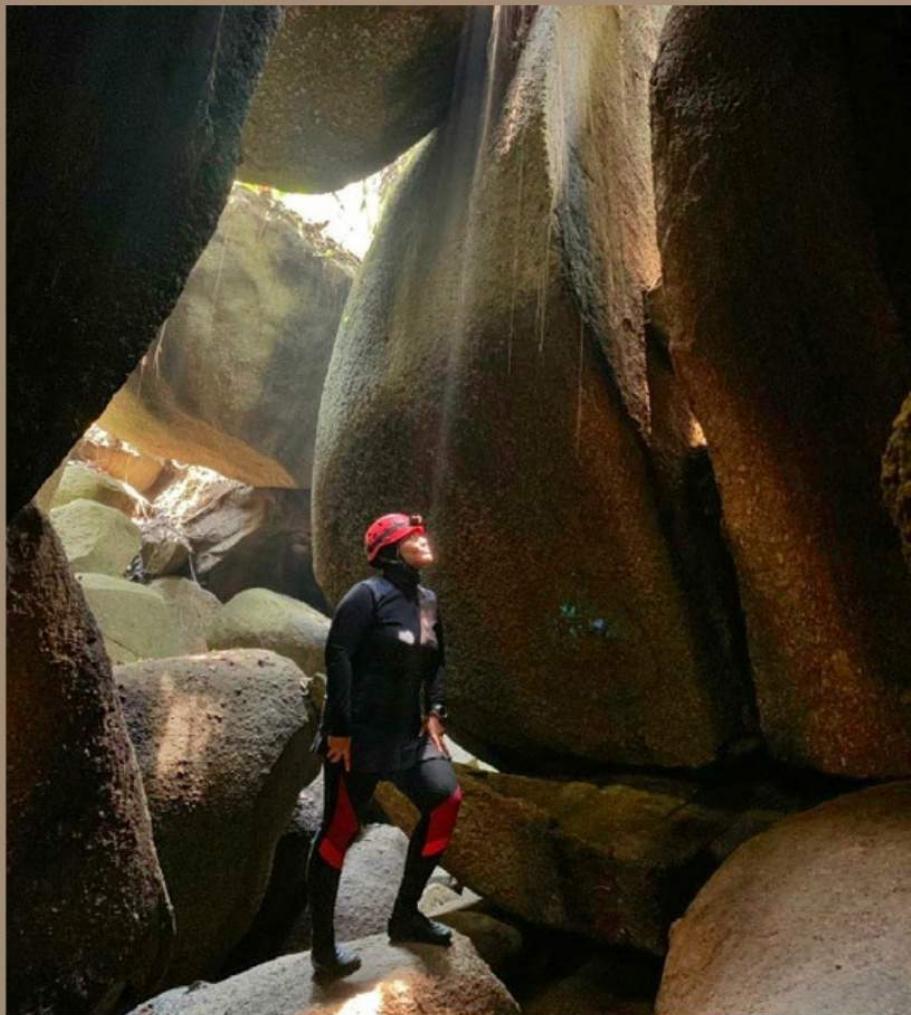




BRINGING BACK NATURE AS PART OF THE COMMUNITY

It began with a very personal passion and change of profession by the company's founder, Rashihah Nordin. She used to work in the health care industry but left to pursue doing something that she was long passionate about; nature.

Inspired to share her love for nature and related activities, in 2015 she took the leap and transformed her interest into a nature adventure business - RNR Adventures - where RNR stands for Rashihah Nordin Resources (RNR).



Her business started off with kayaking and white-water rafting activities at lakes and rivers in Perak. But she had another passion that she was able to add in 2017; caving. RNR ran its caving adventures specifically at Gua Batu Maloi cave, Johol, Negeri Sembilan. Today on average RNR conducts about 80 percent of its packages on Gua Batu Maloi caving, 13 percent rafting, 5 percent kayaking and 2 percent on freediving.

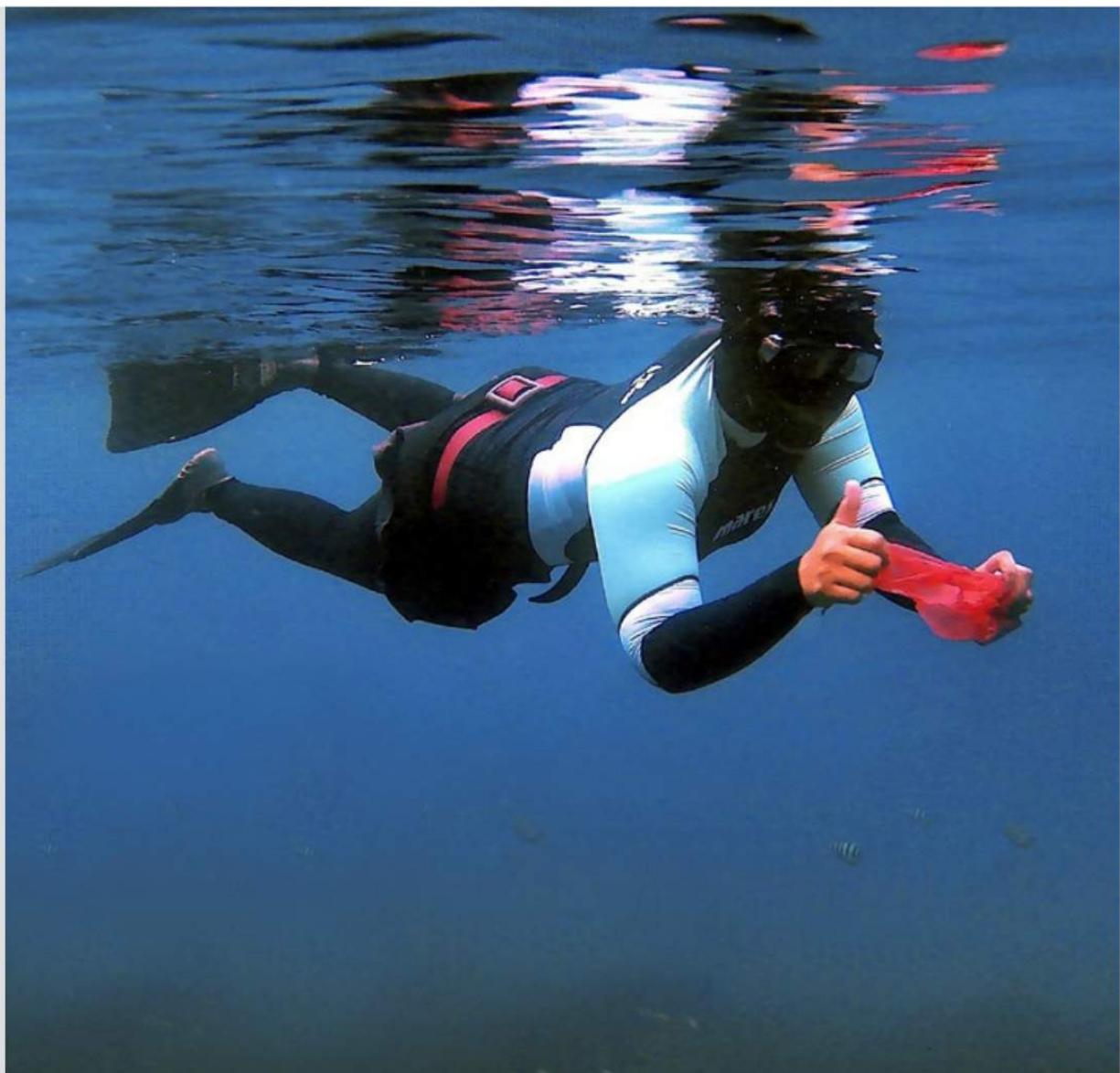
RNR's 'flagship' package is a day caving trip of about 4 to 5 hours exploring Gua Batu Maloi, an adventure that at times can be very challenging. A related package offers 2D1N caving and camping where participants camp over at Taman

Eko-Rimba Batu Maloi park with permission from the Kuala Pilah Forestry Office.

To cater to clients who request the two-day overnight package, RNR also conducts teambuilding and energiser programmes, plus optional abseiling and night jungle trekking at the forest reserve.

From the start, in order to best use resources, RNR harnessed freelancers rather than full-timers when it came to human capital for guides. In fact, creating local jobs and gaining community trust was one way that led RNR on its road to success.





Although selective when looking for freelance guides, it was an integral idea when setting up the company that a first thing was to get as much involvement of the local community as possible; from guides to social media communication and more.

However, despite initially not having many guides coming from the immediate community itself, for the Gua Batu Maloi caving activities most of them do come from nearby areas and are experts of the locality.

Over the years, RNR has seen a rise in customers of up to 20 percent annually. Local groups make up 90 percent whereas 10 percent are overseas clients, (mostly Singaporean).

Tertiary level students make up the bulk of local participants, with a large proportion from nearby universities and colleges including polytechnics especially those doing Diploma in Tourism Management.



Mrs. Rashihah Nordin
Founder

“

Various initiatives have been taken in elevating safety levels for all RNR participants, among them applying strict SOP requirements and hiring guides who are well-trained for every trip. In addition, wearing helmets for the entire caving trip is a must for all participants. These are to ensure that everyone in the expedition is in optimum safety while enjoying the beauty of Gua Batu Maloi cave, which has its own truly unique qualities.

”

STRICT SOP AND GUIDE HIRING FOR UTMOST SAFETY

For the best experience and safety of customers, RNR developed its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), while also referring to, for example, existing caving and other guidelines, coupled with strict selection when employing guides.

All guides must be registered with the local Forestry Department. On top of that, at least one guide in a trip must be a certified first aid responder. Those who do not have the required certification are advised and assisted to do so within a certain time frame.

The SOP includes the requisite Indemnity Form to be filled early and will allow the company and guide team to be fully aware of existing medical conditions and take extra precaution for any potential emergency cases. A comprehensive safety briefing is done before any activity begins, which includes careful explanation of the cave conditions and demonstration of all equipment to be used in the adventure route.

From 2019, RNR included more safety features in its caving package where every participant including the guide needs to use a helmet provided by the company. Additional safety and comfort features including for example headlamps and so on can be furnished on client's prior request.

RNR provides in all of its caving trips at least one standard safety bag containing rescue rope, all-purpose knife, communication device and of

course first aid supplies fit for the type of activity.

In fact, RNR noticed that its good practices were being emulated by other local caving operators. Thus, RNR became a pioneer in changing and improving the safety of adventurers, which also changed the existing operational landscape of local nature activities for the better. In a latest measure, RNR has enhanced its packages with caving activity insurance. While it is optional, a good number of participants who realise its benefits have taken up the coverage as it is a tough nature activity.

All these initiatives offered by RNR to ensure the safety and protection of participants are part of the attributes that enabled the company to be awarded MaTEx certification. The award gives further confidence to RNR's customers and in turn helps to ensure the company's future continuity and expansion.



MONITOR THE WEATHER! IN FACT, MONITOR EVERYTHING

After a near-miss experience in 2018 when Rashihah herself was hit with a sudden water gush from probably a cluttered logs dam that broke after heavy rain, RNR became even more cautious when handling trips especially during the rainy season or in any conditional uncertainties.

During rainy seasons, clients are advised that booked activities would only be confirmed two to three days before the actual trip because heavy rain over the forest could affect conditions and make it dangerous. Thus, a rain monitoring app is used for near real-time data. Other than that, RNR will also contact Taman Eko-Rimba Gunung Datuk Park office on the weather and other conditions at the area as it could also affect caving activity safety at Gua Batu Maloi.

The company is proud to be the first caving activity operator to make it compulsory to wear a helmet since the incident, while also adds to the sense of serious adventure

for participants. Likewise, a first that each trip is equipped with standard safety kit bag containing rescue rope, safety knife, first aid, communications device etc.

Besides those, after the incident, the company also tried to limit the group size for each trip to only 50 participants, however, due to issues arising during bookings, the limit was then extended back to that was previously set which was 150 pax, but with extra safety measures especially pertaining to participants' age, weight and also weather monitoring. The ratio for guides is also put at one for every 13 participants, as suitable for the Gua Batu Maloi activity.

For overall safety, RNR also decided to set the allowable participants age to 12 years and above only, except for any family caving group where a child between 6-12 are only allowed to follow the excursion with discretion and parents' full understanding of the risks involved. The company also looks at the weight factor where participants may not be above 110kg, as any heavier it may be difficult to carry or pull the person out to safety in case an emergency evacuation needs to be done.



SETTING AN EXAMPLE ON HELPING THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

An environment lover, Rashihah was inspired by like-minded friends during her freelancing stint as an Environmental Camp Trainer at Green Ranger Malaysia, an NGO funded by the Emkay Foundation (of MK Land) to care for the environment.

River guides in Gopeng whom she had networked with would bond together cleaning the river, and sparked the idea of cleaning up any trash that was found during RNR's own caving trips.

Believing that one must minimise any negative impact on nature, RNR is also the first caving operator at Batu Maloi to include bringing along a net during trips to clean up and conserve the cave in their SOP. This also concerns something as

trivial as cigarette butts - admitting though that it was at first a challenge to encourage even the guides themselves to do so, especially since some of them are smokers.

But Rashihah believed that setting a good example would indirectly encourage her customers to be more aware of environmental conservation. That is why even customers are also from the start advised to bring back their own trash after use.

On top of that customers and guides alike are also pointed out not to disturb nature by even holding or touching any fauna along the trip, to avoid disturbing the ecosystem and also possibly injury or infection.

RNR also harnesses a mutually beneficial partnership with the local community through those who own local businesses and supplies ranging from catering to homestay and other village activities, as per request by customers.

Each caterer contracted to prepare meals for participants is encouraged to minimise the use of single-use plastics in food services including polystyrene, instead using either reusable or biodegradable containers.



BLOGGING IS STILL RELEVANT AS PART OF MARKETING

With social media being the current and foreseeable trend, from her experience Rashihah believes that blogging is still her way to go when promoting RNR's packages. In the beginning, pretty much 100 percent of its successful marketing strategy was through blog postings, which then evolved into personal referrals and recommendations.



Indeed, a search on Google regarding Gua Batu Maloi will usually highlight RNR-related webpages. Internet searches would eventually bring up Rashihah's blog site and it has become a major referral or link on Gua Batu Maloi and local caving.

Rashihah also believes that using her own personal profiles on other social media platforms, rather than a purely company account, creates personal closeness and trust for RNR's current and future customers.

Blogging using her personal blogs posted in English has even helped in getting foreign customers. Currently about 10 percent of RNR's customers are international, coming mostly from Singapore as well as expatriates or students residing there or in Malaysia.

However, to complement her blog, social media accounts are also used to ensure presence in the cyber world. Rashihah hires trusted

freelancers to ensure her company's Facebook and Instagram accounts are updated based on her blogs and the latest adventure activities plus attractive photos, especially at Gua Batu Maloi. This includes the use of relevant hashtags in each posting. Rashihah believes that this combined strategy is raising the numbers of interested followers or potential and repeat customers.

But other than using online blogs and social media as marketing platforms, Rashihah insists that quality service is always the priority at RNR. As one of the ways to ensure sustained quality, Rashihah also uses Google My Business platform, which allows all participants and clients to review her team's performance and offer their feedback. The input is invaluable in helping RNR to always improve for the future.

RASHIHAH NORDIN RESOURCES (RNR) FULFILLING THE DESIRE FOR NATURE AND ADVENTURE

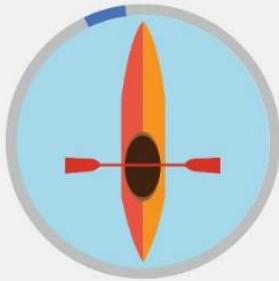
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80%
CAVING



13%
RAFTING



5%
KAYAKING



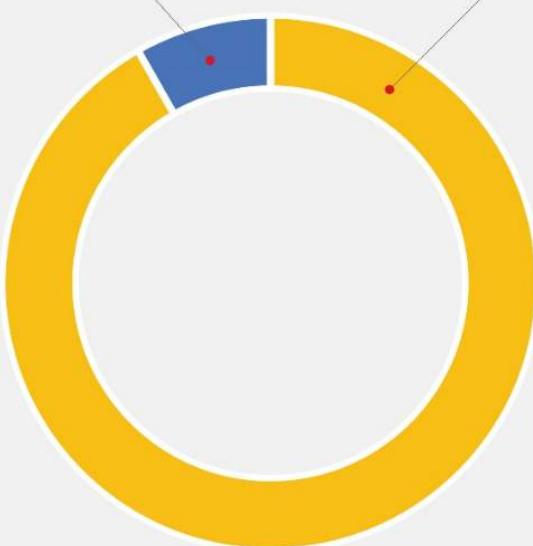
2%
FREEDIVING

BRINGING BACK NATURE AS PART OF THE COMMUNITY

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10% are overseas
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Singaporean)

Local groups
make up
90%



STRICT SOP AND GUIDE HIRING FOR UTMOST SAFETY

RNR provides in all of its caving trips at least one standard safety bag containing rescue rope, all-purpose knife, communication device and of course first aid supplies fit for the type of activity.



MONITOR THE WEATHER! IN FACT, MONITOR EVERYTHING

The company is proud to be the first caving activity operator to make it compulsory to wear a helmet since the incident, while also adds to the sense of serious adventure for participants.

A first that each trip is equipped with standard safety kit bag containing rescue rope, safety knife, first aid, communications device etc.

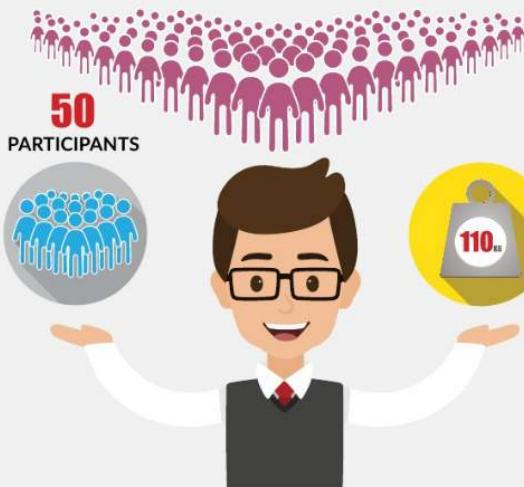
For overall safety, RNR also decided to set the allowable participants age to **12 years** and above only, except for any family caving group where a child between **6-12** are only allowed to follow the excursion with discretion and parents' full understanding of the risks involved.



SAFETY HELMET



CHILD BETWEEN 6-12



RNR limit the group size for each trip to only 50 participants, however, due to issues arising during bookings, the limit was then extended back to 150 pax.

The company also looks at the weight factor where participants may not be above 110kg, as any heavier it may be difficult to carry or pull the person out to safety in case an emergency evacuation needs to be done.



SETTING AN EXAMPLE ON HELPING THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

Believing that one must minimise any negative impact on nature, RNR is also the first caving operator at Batu Maloi to include bringing along a net during trips to clean up and conserve the cave in their SOP.



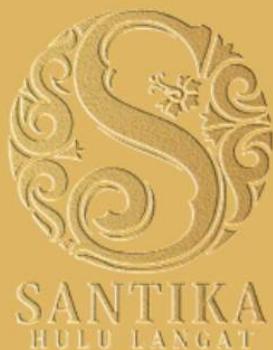
BLOGGING IS STILL RELEVANT AS PART OF MARKETING

With social media being the current and foreseeable trend, from her experience Rashihah believes that blogging is still her way to go when promoting RNR's packages.

SOCIAL MEDIA



**CAPTIVATING
TRADITIONAL
EXPERIENCES
AWAIT IN A
NOSTALGIC
KAMPUNG
ENCLAVE**





Evolution can be a funny thing, starting from one thing and leading to another. Yet it is a lesson in survival, where those who are bold enough to evolve and change into new forms will not only survive, but thrive. Santika Hulu Langat (Santika) is a great example of this 'thriving evolution' model. Hasan Suyat, whose family owns the 7-acre riverside land that Santika sits on, went through the whole process and evolved with it.

Starting out as Orchard Homestay Hulu Langat, the place began like just any other hundreds of homestay programmes, struggling to find its footing and uniqueness while competing with each other for the same market of especially foreign tourists.

A first sign of difficulty was in its name; "orchard" sounds like a nice enough name in English but surprisingly many non-native speakers had difficulty either in pronouncing or understanding it and frequently mixing it up with "orchid" - so that had to change. A second challenge was what customers expected; while homestays away from big cities were fine with offering rooms in their homes, customers for those closer to Kuala Lumpur seemed to prefer more chalet-like privacy and individual experiences - so that had to change too.

Probably the biggest evolution was its identity; the initial typical Malay kampung style offering had too many other similar homestay competitors and was too 'normal' for domestic tourists - so a new

focus had to be found with its own differentiating identity while still manifesting the local community and culture. The answer lay in Hasan's own family roots.

Being Malaysian of pure Javanese ancestry and still retaining aspects of Javan identity, it was natural to return to that and take benefit from it for example in food, music, costume and lifestyle. As for mode of accommodation, likewise it was changed from homestay to the construction of seven mixed-size chalet style units plus a 'dewan' or hall for group activities. And as for the name, it settled on the simple and lovely "Santika" is a loving tribute to the name of Hasan's great-grandfather, with its positive meaning of 'strong' or 'sturdy' in classical Javanese.



Mr. Hasan Muhamad Suyat
Manager

“

Santika's focus evolved away from being just another Malaysian homestay into a place of unique experiences, highlighting authentic Javanese-Malaysian identity; one in which even natives of Java would find interesting in its inter-mixed evolution in Malaysia.

Santika Hulu Langat truly has great potential in being highlighted as a tourist attraction when it is packaged and branded with its unique offerings. Which was why in 2019 the Santika Musical Village package was introduced after taking into consideration the trend and demand of domestic and foreign tourists who were interested in both food and musical attractions.

The readiness to evolve or change was a key element in making Santika a success, as it would be for other lagging places that are willing to change and make tourism in Malaysia on par with other countries in the world.

”



A WINNING PACKAGE COMBINING FOOD, MUSIC AND CULTURE

The people of the island of Java in what is today Indonesia are of course part of the same great native Austronesian ethnic group of the Malay Archipelago or Nusantara, and in the olden days had all cross-migrated and co-existed across the vast archipelago, including in the Malay Peninsula for hundreds of years where the Javanese today enjoy an assimilated hybrid identity after mixing with local Malays.



Likewise with Hasan Suyat's family and their local Javan community, to appeal with just enough distinctiveness to Malaysians while being readily unique for foreigners they began offering mixed Javanese-Malay food such as '*lontong*', '*nasi lemak*' and '*sambal tahu*', wore Javanese costumes such as '*beskap surjan*' and '*blangkon*' headgear, used Javanese terms in describing things and lifestyle aspects, and with a major attraction being playing the exotic Sundanese (West Javanese) '*angklung*' musical instrument ensemble. The *angklung* is a winner for Santika, as it is the most versatile music-maker made of intricately cut bamboo, and is the Malay World's equivalent to the European piano.

Thus, Santika Musical Village which fulfilled these attractions was born with the *angklung* and accompanying music, complete with a generous local buffet breakfast and a selection of other activities from colouring of '*batik*' fabric and various traditional games, to demonstrations of versatile coconut uses and even a little study excursion to a magical herbal camp. Participants are also introduced to the unique traditional Javanese characters and language

to expand their cultural knowledge. The Santika Musical Village package starts from 8 am in the morning and ends 3 pm in the evening where in between, various activities are held at different locations around the village.

In 2019 the '*Sarapan Santika*' (*Santika Breakfast*) was officially included in the Santika Musical Village package and became a hit. The Sunday affair of food, music and lifestyle brought in even more Malaysians than foreigners, with up to 80 percent being locals who came to enjoy the '*Gabungan Tradisi Nusantara*'. Package participants were able to not just indulge in a delicious buffet while being serenaded by the traditional music, but even get the opportunity to try playing the classic musical instrument and also watch an expert cooking demonstration of making '*roti jala*' (*fishnet pancake*), which they can try making too.

Santika has successfully accommodated up to 500 people in one go in 2019 for the Santika Musical Village package. That's a lot of people but being former paddy field land, the wide terrain is fairly flat and the support facilities

were well-prepared beforehand. A large field also enables telematch-type activities, coupled with the surrounding river for swimming, and spacious accommodation options. June each year is the best time to savour local fruits such as '*manggis*' (mangosteen), rambutan and the 'king of fruits', durian, that are planted around the village.

With all that, Santika's offerings and packages revolve around the Javanese Malay experience plus accommodation as desired for up to 70 pax, whether for local families to wedding groups and to any type of foreign tourists. For example, Santika found that Americans doing what is called their Remote Year of working, love to begin their stay experience in Malaysia by visiting Santika, where they get to experience Malay/Malaysian, Javanese and Sundanese cross-cultures all in one deliciously satisfying breakfast/food event. Hasan calls this their '*gabutra*' short for '*gabungan tradisi*' or combination of Austronesian cultures - quite a cross-cultural achievement for what evolved from a humble homestay.



A BALANCE BETWEEN SUPERB SERVICE & ATTRACTIOnS AND PROFITABLE OPERATIONS

As in any business, there has to be a balance between good value-for-money and profit sustainability. Hasan and the Santika team are always on the lookout for what visitors want, what works and whether it can be done as cost-effectively as possible.

How do they gather the data on customer behaviours, preferences and trends? While as a small family-run entity, they may not use highly scientific methods, they do use keen observation and feedback especially direct questions to visitors and even potential visitors met at other places.



From such feedback, the Santika Musical Village package was formulated, other than accommodation. In the meantime, an activity such as visitors wearing Malay traditional attire experience was discontinued, given the hot weather. Instead it was changed such that Santika's crew were the ones wearing traditional costumes, offering comfortable opportunity for visitors to photograph and be photographed with them. Santika continued strengthening the

elements and experiences of food and music which are the more perennial interests.

In order to provide what works for customers, Santika's owners needed to know how to procure and offer such things that visitors want.

This is where attending the Inbound Tourism Bootcamp (ITB), a programme organised and supported by Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) under the

Tourism Productivity Nexus (TPN) helped give a big impact to Hasan and Santika. ITB training opened his eyes and formed new ways of thinking and doing things, towards the importance of networking and how to go about collaborating rather than going it alone or even competing. Hasan adds, *"ITB became a reason or thrust, even a platform to push, entice and collaborate with people and parties that I would not have realised before towards sharing the benefits".*

Today, Santika does have collaborations such as mutual cross-marketing packages with other attractions that are not far from their Hulu Langat area including Terra Pong, a medium high-end teakwood Thai restaurant with traditional Malay (*Limas*) and Javanese (*Joglo*) architecture built over water, where patrons can later go for dinner after their time at Santika. Also, there's Aman Dusun Garden, where mutual visitors can go for a luxury escape with high-end accommodation and even a spot of milking goats!

ITB also helped give training on the structure of tourism packaging, pricing efficiency and affordability. For example, instead of piling on all kind of attractive services or add-ons and thus costs on to a package, just offer the bare basic attraction, with other value-added things as options.

That keeps things simple and affordable, thus attractive, and that is how the Santika Musical Village was priced; a nice one-day food and activities package at just RM80 per pax, not including transport or guide but with advice given on how to come and to best navigate the package activities, each with its own host acting as guide.

But if guests would like to have transport or use a personalised guide on site, these are available at very reasonable rates in collaboration with local providers, thus helping the local community as well. A guide gives more value in knowledge and storytelling, especially for foreigners.

For overall operational cost-effectiveness, Hasan strongly advises using a budgetary application for example YNAB (You Need A Budget) to help manage and rein on budgeting, something which new or inexperienced entrepreneurs are weak at and may even cause failure in business.

Every business outfit needs to seriously list down its comprehensive costs and budget for the whole year, not just on monthly basis. It is critical to know what really needs to be spent on. For Hasan, every month a sum of 20 percent of sales will be

retained first as profit. The remaining 80 percent takes care of all the business overheads including for salaries, maintenance works, water and electric bills etc. Santika will only reinvest the 20 percent retained savings to enhance its facilities and improve customer experiences. In other words, as Hasan quotes, "Follow the budget, not the bank balance"!

Hasan adds that, "It is easier to engage in cutting costs rather than making sales, especially for start-up businesses. For example, we cut paying cable TV fees for each guest house but used an Internet-based TV service that allowed sharing between the houses. A very big cost-saving was negotiating a win-win arrangement with the maestro angklung performer, where instead of paying up to RM3,000 per performance, it was instead agreed on a year-long contract where there

would be a fixed payment of RM500 every session that Santika Musical Village takes place", thus giving a secure regular income for the angklung performer in return.

Hasan stresses the need to review and revise which foods are popular, adjusting the quantities or even re-evaluating well-known foods that are not mainly consumed, and also to be ready with immediate re-order capability with community suppliers in case there's a sudden surge of visitors!

Santika adopts AirBnB's standards in hospitality operations, and offers seamless customer experience, with 'minimal bureaucracy' such as self check-in and during the MCO period it uses the official Selangkah movement tracing application. All of which not only enhance customer experience but can help save costs too.





PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY

Besides profitability, importantly related to that is the wider sustainability of Santika's surrounding community. After all, Santika works with and supports local community and village neighbours in procuring many things so that it doesn't need to do everything alone.

At least seven households are involved in preparing or supplying food for Santika events. Even single mothers, widows and other participating community members get the benefit of regularly supplying the food and drink.

Many are specialised in cooking the best particular dishes or even just its accompaniments such as the best 'sambal' sauce for 'nasi lemak'. A Malaysian bloke from Klang complimented that the 'sambal nasi lemak' brings him on a journey 30-odd years back to his childhood days!



With all the community participation, Santika needs only a relatively small team of just five permanent workers to efficiently manage its seven-acre land with all the chalets or guest units and facilities.

In fact, for the mutual cooperation among Santika's community, Hasan explains that they turn again to Javanese roots for something much deeper than just food, clothes and music but to its philosophy. They rely on the tradition of communal cooperation called '*guyub*', or principles of togetherness, which helps ensure that everyone is taken care of while contributing to the community.

To a certain extent, the government has also incorporated this, in which for each community where there is a homestay or similar programme there is a "*hos komuniti setempat*", HKS or '*local community host*' who must be knowledgeable in the community and area to act as host for visitor groups.

Besides that, in the vicinity there are also four households involved in local tour guiding that Santika can tap on. In fact, for larger groups, Santika even engages with homestay operators in Hulu Langat to offer additional accommodation requirements.



The idea of sustainability even extends into having activities or internal tours that highlight cultural practices that are related to nature and sustainability. Indeed, at different spots around Santika and the surrounding village there are tour stops with hosts who help explain how traditional life was so environmentally friendly and inspires us to return to being more in tune with nature.

HOPES FOR GROWTH FROM LOCAL TO EVEN VIRTUAL

While Santika admittedly does not rely too much on Internet marketing, it does have its own normal YouTube and other social media channels that to a certain extent have helped in its online presence. However, Hasan notes that so far WOM or Word of Mouth still appears to be the biggest pull factor.





Santika doesn't even rely on its website too much, as Hasan finds that many Malaysians prefer to just ask by WhatsApp or call for almost everything, but he has begun harnessing crowd power in promoting Santika through affiliate marketing since the coronavirus lockdown.

Hasan and Santika's hope is to rise from a still micro business to a medium level i.e. RM3 million turnover income. Hasan also laments that Malaysia is still lagging in terms of digital technology or online virtual marketing and experience offering.

Santika was in fact one of the first respondents to participate and offer an online pay experience of an interesting "Sing-angk-long" (a play on 'sing' and 'angklung') on the MyVXp or My Virtual Experience platform organised also by MPC, which successfully raised income during a time that everything was in lockdown. Hasan says, "We have to help push industry players rise through the SME pyramid especially those affected such as Tourist Guides, so that in a crisis such as Covid-19, they can switch to digital technology and use it to their advantage".

For us to survive and thrive, we must be able to adapt to changes and think creatively.





CAPTIVATING TRADITIONAL EXPERIENCES AWAITS IN A NOSTALGIC KAMPUNG ENCLAVE



A BALANCE BETWEEN SUPERB SERVICE & ATTRACTIONS AND PROFITABLE OPERATIONS

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Terra Pong, a medium high-end teakwood Thai restaurant with traditional Malay (Limas).

Javanese (Joglo) architecture built over water, where patrons can later go for dinner after their time at Santika.

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SELANGKAH
Selamat Melangkah Step in Safety

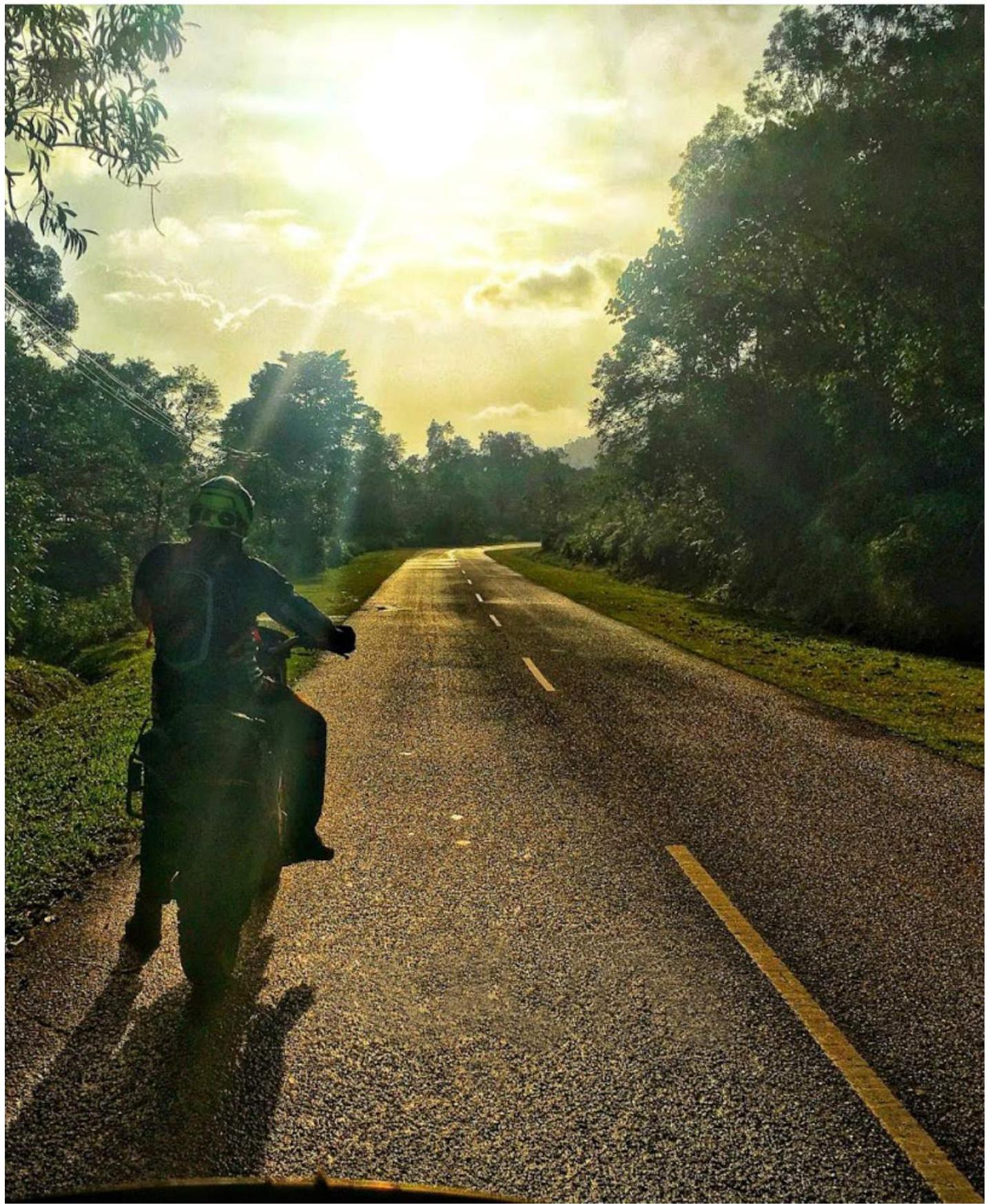
airbnb

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SPECIAL ADVENTURES BY MOTORBIKE OR 4X4, AND MORE SEAAT RESOURCES

**SOUTH EAST ASIA
ADVENTURE TRAVEL**





FROM PERSONAL PASSION & CONNECTION TO A NICHE BUSINESS MISSION

Fancy a big bike road touring journey complete with scenic landscapes and camping too? Or a 4WD convoy in a challenging off-road expedition through jungles and remote villages?

Well, SEAAT Resources (SEAAT) is a fast-rising company in this popular niche market of motorcycle touring packages, as well as in 4x4 or 4WD expeditions and related tours both on and off-road.



Standing for South East Asia Adventure Travel, SEAAT aptly also offers various motor touring and expeditions for surrounding countries and even further afield. However, despite being fairly knew – the company was established in 2017 – SEAAT has earned a good reputation with its diverse and well-executed packages that have pulled in many repeat clients from neighbouring Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, and of course from Malaysia itself.

Surprisingly (or maybe not), SEAAT came about not through purposeful planning but through a fortuitous combination of passion, connection and compulsion.

The main founder had worked at the Wildlife Department, where his knowledge of jungles and terrain

as well as connections made with various people including villagers in off-road route areas were key in this endeavour.

He also had a passion for motorbikes and such, thus he opened a motor repair shop. When that did not do as well as hoped, that passion compelled him to take up the opportunity to venture into specialised motorcycle as well as 4x4 tour and expedition packages. The passion, the networking and hard effort together with good teamwork resulted in SEAAT, which gained fast-growing reputation in the niche motoring world.

SEAAT's offerings such as the Gopeng Big Trailie Fun package became a hot item; until today it is a monthly 2D1N tour staple with bikers from beginners to old-timers.

Using the founder's knowledge of little-known exciting routes among Gopeng's ex-mining 'thousand lakes', also critically the timing for the coolest rides and best light moment for photos, plus camping and food all thrown in with friendly villagers' interaction, this is a hit at just RM350/pax. As SEAAT's founder said, "This package really kicked in with the off-road bike trend. We have to know how to leverage trends well".

SEAAT's combination of personal passion, accumulated knowledge, old relationships and teamwork make their offerings hard for others to replicate.

“

Interest in the motoring world became the ‘track’ in opening up a business that pioneers unique adventure packages for both local and foreign tourists. Not only the joy of riding motorbikes, we also bring our clients to savour off-road treks and sceneries that are so rarely discovered by any individuals before this, making our packages known as “must-tries”. The experiences that riders will discover will in fact be unique according to the package or destination taken, which at the same time increase SEAAT’s customer retention rate.

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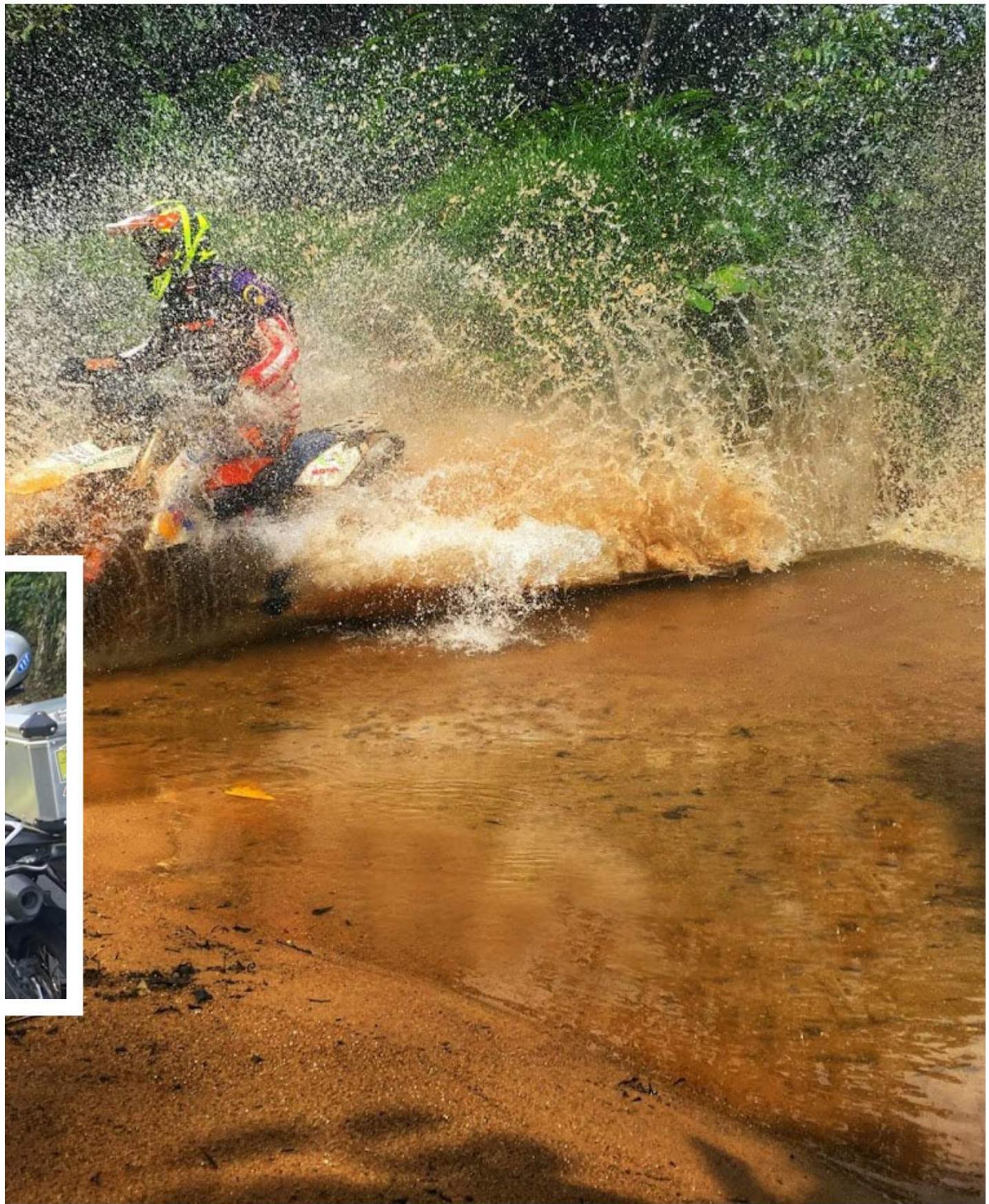
Mrs. Rima Rohayati Abdul Jalil

Manager

Mr. Abu Zahrim Ismail aka Pak Aboo

Tour Coordinator





SERVICE & CONVENIENCE THE KEYS TO 'MOTORISE' SEAAT'S CLIENTS

From the beginning, a combination of good personal service and great individual convenience in implementing SEAAT's initial tour offerings gave the start-up a head-start in attracting and then retaining customers.



From personal experience with avid biking, the founders knew that big biker groups want to have the pleasure of using high-performance motorbikes in enjoyable rides, challenging routes, mesmerising sceneries (offering great photographs) and quite critically for biking - minimal luggage.

Thus, SEAAT devised packages that included as much services and conveniences for bikers to just enjoy their ride and leave all the logistics (camping paraphernalia, food, permits, health and safety matters) to the tour operator and guide. Just about everything was provided, even towels for swimming at the waterside.

As the founder advised, "Why buy or bring your own? We'll make you feel at home." Few other tour providers had offered such complete services and comprehensive convenience,

SEAAT's service even goes to the top, literally. For its Best of Dabong ride package in Kelantan, participants will actually climb Mount Stong to reach a dazzling waterfall. There the sunrise from atop the falls is also the most beautiful in all the Malay Peninsula. This Dabong package is so special, it is only offered twice a year.

For bikers who want to bring their family, they can come by own car and gather at the campsite. While

the biker in the family will then go ahead with the bike ride, SEAAT even thinks of and makes additional convenience and exciting activities available for the rest of the family, from sectioned campsite to white-water rafting, caving, abseiling and more, in collaboration with other local operators, thus also helping the local community's economy.

SEAAT also entices nature lovers with its Back to Nature package in Malaysia's Taman Negara (the National Park) at Kuala Tahan. It offers not only a different experience from other SEAAT packages, but is also distinctive from others that go to Kuala Tahan, as the owner was a Wildlife Ranger and knows insider local routes, activities (such as swimming in the Tembeling River) as well as exciting opportunities to see wild animals in their element including wild boar, elephant, sambar deer, hornbills and even the elusive *seladang* or gaur, the largest wild cow species in the world. An overnight stay at a raised *bum bun* or 'hide' structure in the jungle near a *jenut* or 'salt lick' gives a better chance for such wildlife encounters.

SEAAT succeeds in giving packages each with a truly different experience yet every package offers certain shared qualities, among them;

01 As the founder points out, "It's not about luxury, but about real adventure and getting real-life experiences, by for example staying in small family-run lodgings or we even camp out".

02 Keeping the groups as small and intimate as possible, and reaching classic destinations while trying to steer away from mainstream tourist traps.

03 This includes eating at local eateries, to taste real regional dishes using local ingredients.

04 Package prices are made surprisingly affordable despite having very good safety and health considerations included. This is also to attract and allow more people to enjoy the packages and build volume. As the founder says, "Profit is legitimate and important but not the 'be all and end all' for us", which is why till now 90 percent of its clientele are locals, something a bit unusual for such Malaysian tourism operators.

05 All packages include collaboration with trusted local operators, not only for a win-win scenario of sharing the cake, but also for extending cross-marketing of each other's offerings, while strengthening local tourism sustainability. After all no company can do everything on its own at the same time. Here lies the power of maximising customer experiences without incurring extra effort and cost. By extension this collaboration helps to promote other local tourism products that boost the overall tourism sector.

06 For package bookings with high participant numbers, SEAAT hires from its network of recognised and experienced freelancers with certified skills such as first aid, to ensure that clients are well taken care of.

07 Since the company is personally driven, SEAAT is always ready to customise and even to try and accommodate special requests, for example sourcing for a private portable toilet shed as requested by a ladies' 4x4 expedition group.

08 Attention to detail for customers including all the above is the reason for the company's high return rate; SEAAT achieves almost 95 percent repeat clients for its packages.





SAFETY & CERTIFICATION RIGHT UP TO THE IRON

SEAAT's comprehensive care for safety and health are one of its biggest attractions that bring repeat or referral customers. Its trip packages include not just a first aid-trained motor guide but also a certified paramedic (although fortunately no medical emergencies have happened). This feature alone has resulted in new client recommendations by previous customers from even Singapore.

As a rule, for motorcycle tours, one motor-guide is provided for every eight bikers, while the maximum number of bikes allowed per tour is 20 machines with three guides.



For 4WD adventures, SEAAT includes accompanying spare cars according to convoy size, and even checks the routes before tours. For one project that was done for 120 Thai Nissan participants, SEAAT even arranged for repairs to the tune of RM20,000 to be done, as the existing off-roads were too damaged.

For this project, SEAAT successfully concluded three successive off-road groups through four states; Perak, Melaka, Pahang, finishing at Kuala Terengganu, in which each tour had 40 Nissan vehicles accompanied by four spare cars.

Besides ensuring that each participant fills in the indemnity form declaration and attends safety briefings, especially on how to handle off-road bike rides before each trip, specific insurance is offered at just RM40 per day per pax as a value-added option. All these safety measures to ensure the optimum well-being of customers give SEAAT a good reputation in this market.

In 2019, SEAAT succeeded in garnering the Malaysia Tourism Excellence (MaTEx) Business Certification Programme, which among other things acknowledged

the company's excellence in safety measures that helped minimise overall risks. This recognition helped as a selling point for SEAAT to expand into the international market.

MaTEx aims to grow local tourism businesses to the next level, improve the quality of tourism products and services, and subsequently enhance tourists' trust and confidence in Malaysia's tourism products and services. The programme also aims to recognise quality local tourism offerings.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS FROM “NO BUTTS” TO “NO GLUTS”

SEAAT's concern for the environment goes beyond the usual briefings but also hands-on demos on safe and environment-conserving ride techniques or tactics.



A step further; many riders are also smokers. SEAAT even makes it a point that all smokers cannot throw away their cigarette butts on the ground. They must be kept until disposed of at the campsite or in proper recycle bins. People still do not realise that many cigarettes actually contain non-biodegradable micro-plastic in the butt's filter, and leaving them on the ground in the long run does not help the environment.

On a bigger scale, SEAAT has a policy of always using existing off-road trails, rural lanes and forest routes such as old logging roads and sustaining them physically and commercially. Thus, no new trails are to be created in SEAAT's 4WD packages that may disturb pristine environments, of which after creation the new trails may not be used often and cause a glut in off-road routes.



HIGH VISUALS AND LOW PRICING AS SEAAT'S MARKETING 'MOTOR'

Like just about everyone else, SEAAT realises that social media is a very powerful tool especially for specialised or niche markets such as its motorcycle or big bike and 4x4 expeditions. The company learned this by experience as many customers wanted stunning photos for their social media engagement, which they took during their tours and then shared online. This in turn led to many 'word of mouth' (**WoM**) referrals and enquiries, even surprisingly from many overseas visitors from as far away as different European countries.

The founder of SEAAT actually did a European tour to not just experience their motor tour offerings but also to engage with similar operators there, and learned about Europe's great destinations, scenic routes and excellent service; also discovering the expectations and habits of European bikers (most prefer self-guiding rides rather than open group packages). Nonetheless they also appreciate great pictures. Thus, it's a given that images are super-important for viral material.

SEAAT in fact engages a freelance photographer and videographer to produce high quality promotional material. The results are uploaded mostly in its Facebook platform where it is noted that most of its targeted customers are found. Nonetheless, to expand its reach to others especially the younger generation, SEAAT uses Instagram as well. All this exciting imagery arouses curiosity in viewers and a desire to see the places for themselves.

SEAAT has thus made it a part of its modus operandi to know not just where the best scenic routes and shots are, but even the best timing and lighting conditions to catch the most evocative images, so that participants will have the most satisfying visual memories and will share them to reach potential customers.

On pricing, being relatively new as a company, SEAAT continues with its affordable-price strategy to encourage more tours and increase volume for longer-term business.

Despite knowing the European riding scene, the founder feels that the company should still focus on what it knows best, which is the Malaysian and Southeast Asian market. As he puts it, "If your specialty is *pisang goreng* (banana fritters), keep improving that before you venture into food from distant lands".

He also wants to entice foreign customers to stay longer in Malaysia and do more value-added activities. Even if they do not take up other SEAAT packages, will benefit the local tourism industry and the country as a whole if they stay longer.



CREATING INNOVATIVE NEW PRODUCTS FOR LONG-TERM BUSINESS SURVIVAL

SEAAT's credibility is such that customers are willing to trust their children with the company to go on their own trip, thus allowing SEAAT to formulate a new Young Backpackers Programme for travellers aged 10 to 17 years.

This lets kids experience supervised group educational travel with daily trip report assignments.

This unusual package not only introduces destination and travel knowledge but helps to develop survival skills in the younger generation with hands-on experiences.

Uniquely, this package lets the young participants take all types of public transportation including train, boat, bus and finally aeroplane. The trip begins by train from KL Sentral via Gemas to Kota Bharu, and ends by flight back to Subang airport.

SEAAT also provides special motorbike rentals that are highly popular with overseas tourists.

For the future, SEAAT's dream is to in fact own a larger fleet of quality motorbikes, maybe even scooters too, and giving rental tour services in at least five major attraction cities including Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Ipoh, Penang and Kuala Terengganu, as part of the company's long-term niche business.



SEAAT RESOURCES (SOUTH EAST ASIA ADVENTURE TRAVEL)

SPECIAL ADVENTURES BY MOTORBIKE OR 4X4, AND MORE SEAAT RESOURCES

SOUTH EAST ASIA ADVENTURE TRAVEL

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SEAAT has earned a good reputation with its diverse and well-executed packages that have pulled in many repeat clients from neighbouring Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, and of course from Malaysia itself.

SEAAT to venture into specialised motorcycle as well as 4x4 tour and expedition packages.

SEAAT's offerings such as the Gopeng Big Trailie Fun package became a hot item.

SEAAT's combination of personal passion, accumulated knowledge, old relationships and teamwork make their offerings hard for others to replicate.

SAFETY & CERTIFICATION RIGHT UP TO THE IRON

SEAAT's comprehensive care for safety and health are one of its biggest attractions that bring repeat or referral customers. Its trip packages include not just a first aid-trained motor guide but also a certified paramedic (although fortunately no medical emergencies have happened). This feature alone has resulted in new client recommendations by previous customers from even Singapore.

As a rule, for motorcycle tours, one motor-guide is provided for every eight bikers, while the maximum number of bikes allowed per tour is 20 machines with three guides.

For 4WD adventures, SEAAT includes accompanying spare cars according to convoy size, and even checks the routes before tours. For one project that was done for 120 Thai Nissan participants, SEAAT even arranged for repairs to the tune of RM20,000 to be done, as the existing off-roads were too damaged.

For this project, SEAAT successfully concluded three successive off-road groups through four states; Perak, Melaka, Pahang, finishing at Kuala Terengganu, in which each tour had 40 Nissan vehicles accompanied by four spare cars.

Besides ensuring that each participant fills in the indemnity form declaration and attends safety briefings, especially on how to handle off-road bike rides before each trip, specific insurance is offered at just RM40 per day per pax as a value-added option. All these safety measures to ensure the optimum well-being of customers give SEAAT a good reputation in this market.

In 2019, SEAAT succeeded in garnering the Malaysia Tourism Excellence (MaTeX) Business Certification Programme, which among other things acknowledged the company's excellence in safety measures that helped minimise overall risks. This recognition helped as a selling point for SEAAT to expand into the international market.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN FROM "NO BUTTS" TO "NO GLUTS"

SEAAT's concern for the environment goes beyond the usual briefings but also hands-on demos on safe and environment-conserving ride techniques or tactics.

A step further; many riders are also smokers. SEAAT even makes it a point that all smokers cannot throw away their cigarette butts on the ground. They must be kept until disposed of at the campsite or in proper recycle bins.

On a bigger scale, SEAAT has a policy of always using existing off-road trails, rural lanes and forest routes such as old logging roads and sustaining them physically and commercially.



WITH SINCERE AND DEEPEST APPRECIATION

Arba Tour & Travel

Hafiz Cherating Activities

Jenoba Adventure Tourism

Maverick Trainers & Consultant Sdn Bhd

Ohana Adventure Sport

ORL Ventures

Outdoor Geeks Products & Services

Pearl Island Adventure

Pulau Buta Eco Tourism

Rashihah Nordin Resources (RNR)

Santika Hulu Langat

SEAAT Resources (South East Asia Adventure Travel)

MPC'S DIRECTORY

HEADQUARTERS (Petaling Jaya)

Malaysia Productivity Corporation

Lorong Produktiviti, Jalan Sultan
46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Tel: 603 – 7955 7266
Fax: 603 – 7957 8068
Email: marketing@mpc.gov.my

MPC REGIONAL OFFICES

Northern Region Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Beg Berkunci 206
Jalan Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir
13200 Kepala Batas Seberang Perai Utara
Pulau Pinang
Tel: 604 – 575 4709
Fax : 604 – 575 4410
Email: nro@mpc.gov.my

Southern Region Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
No. 8 Jalan Padi Mahsuri
Bandar Baru UDA
81200 Johor Bahru, Johor
Tel: 607 – 237 7422 / 237 7644
Fax : 607 – 238 0798
Email: sro@mpc.gov.my

Sabah Region Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Level 2, MAA Tower
No. 6, Lorong Api-Api 1
88000 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
Tel: 6088 – 233 245 / 235 837
Fax: 6088 – 242 815
Email: sbo@mpc.gov.my

Sarawak Region Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Lot 894, Lorong Demak Laut 3A
Taman Perindustrian Demak Laut
93050 Kuching, Sarawak.
Tel: 6082 – 439 959 / 439 960
Fax : 6082 – 439 969
Email: sko@mpc.gov.my

East Coast Region Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Tingkat 14, Menara Zenith
Jalan Putra Square 6
25200 Kuantan, Pahang.
Tel: 609 – 513 1788 / 513 1789
Fax : 609 – 513 8903
Email: ecr@mpc.gov.my

Terengganu Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Lot No. 1F 22
Kompleks Usahawan Terengganu Kubang
Jela, Manir 21200 Kuala Terengganu
Terengganu
Tel: 609 – 615 6089
Fax : 609 – 615 6081
E-mail : ecrt@mpc.gov.my

Kelantan Office

Malaysia Productivity Corporation
Pejabat Negeri Kelantan Tingkat 3
Wisma PERKESO, Jalan Kota Darulnaim
15538 Kota Bharu, Kelantan
Tel: 09-7416260, 09 - 7416262
Fax : 09-7416263
Email: ecrk@mpc.gov.my



HEADQUARTERS (Petaling Jaya)
MALAYSIA PRODUCTIVITY CORPORATION

Lorong Produktiviti
Jalan Sultan, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Tel : +603-7955 7266 | Fax : +603-7957 8068
Email : marketing@mpc.gov.my

Nur Hanim Abd Ghani
Pengurus Kanan
OED/PAT

Saya memperakui bahawa perkhidmatan ini telah dilaksanakan dengan sempurna.