

EXPATLIVING

S I N G A P O R E

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ROMANCE ON STILTS

FANCY CATS
CATAMARAN SAILING

KIDS' STUFF

LANGKAWI
RAINFOREST RAMBLE

S\$5.00



MALAYSIA • ISLAND-HOPPING • CHIANG MAI

The home-grown Berjaya group of hotels has come up with a closer and more affordable option than the Maldives for those who want to sleep just above the water – their recently completed water chalets on stilts are the first in nearby Langkawi.

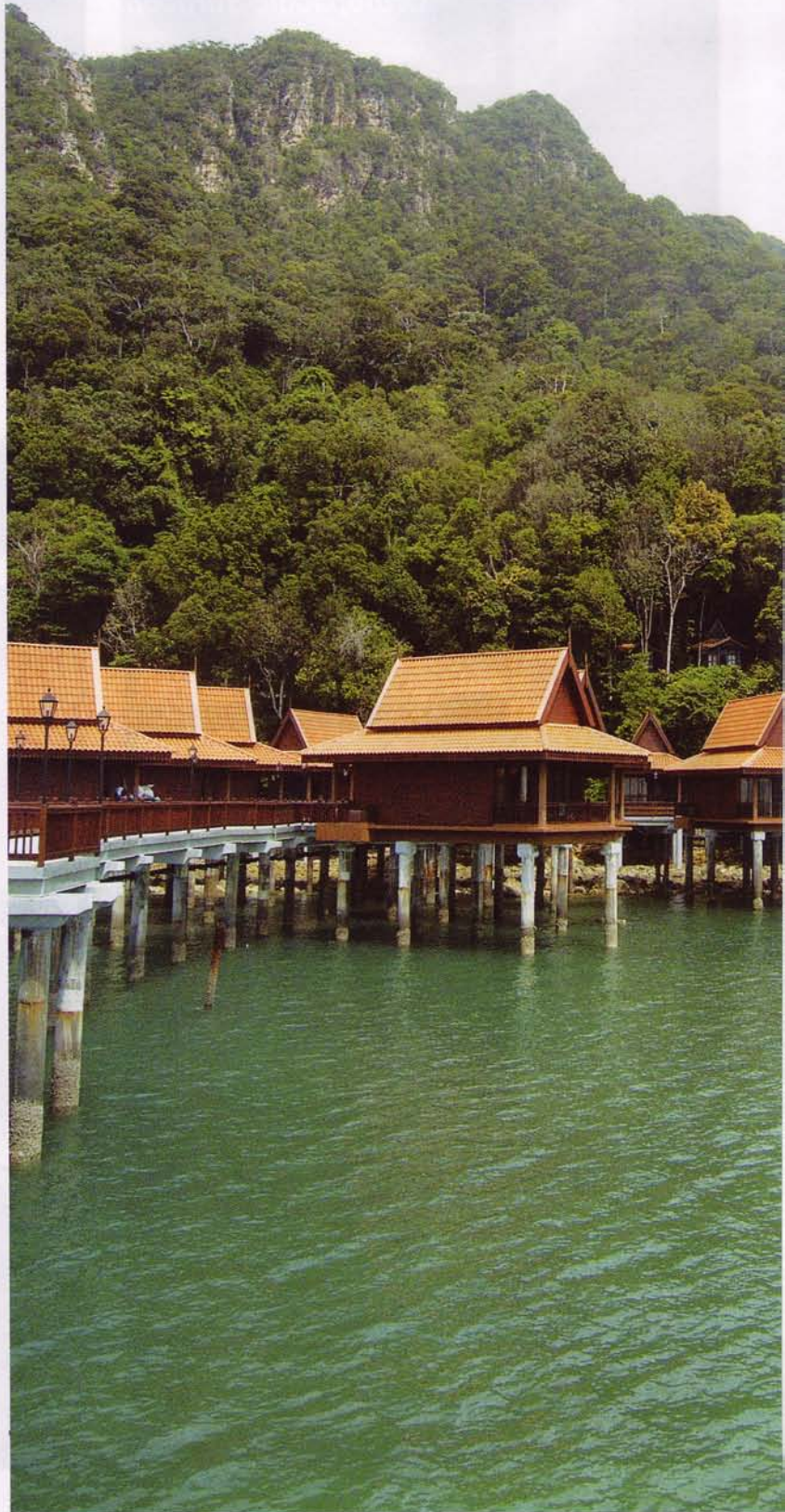
Aside from lovely rooms where you can hear the waves lap below you, the resort and the island have a lot to offer. But what makes the destination exceptional is its location – the hotel is set in natural forest that is thousands of years old.

It is fair to say that the main foyer of the Langkawi Beach Resort and Spa is a little dated but this destination is nevertheless ideal for couples and groups. It has a few different restaurant outlets, including an excellent Chinese restaurant, the Oriental Pearl; the Pantai, a beach restaurant where the buffet breakfast is served; and the Dayang Café, which serves *a la carte* Malaysian and international food throughout the day.

From the foyer, we were taken by the little shuttle buses, which run regularly along the hilly terrain, down to wooden chalets built on stilts over the sea. Each of these brand new chalets has a large bathroom with bath and separate shower, a spacious bedroom and sliding-

Sleeping on Water

by Rebecca Bisset



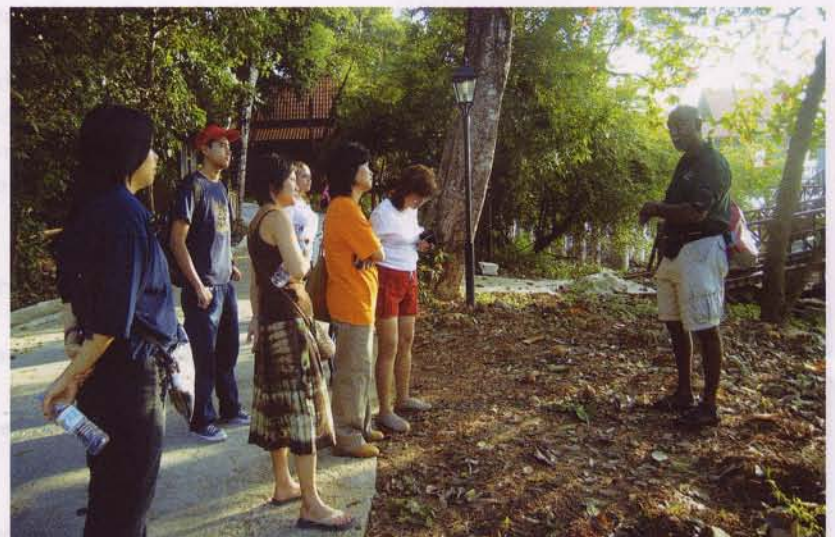
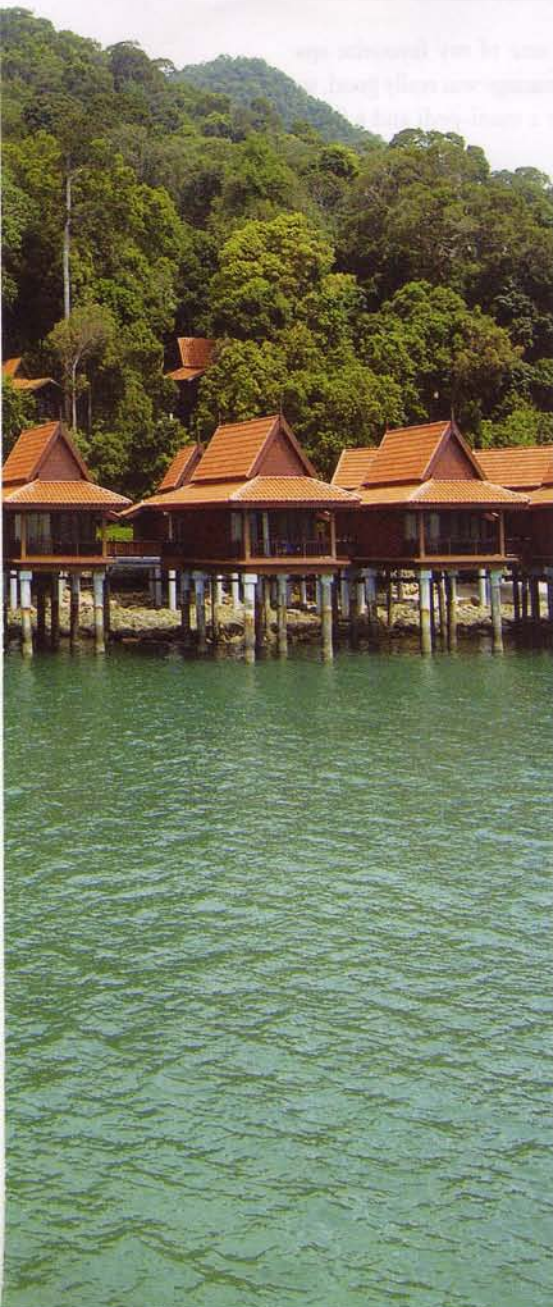


doors that open onto a patio. It is glorious to lie in bed and look out onto nothing but water. Apart from these chalets, there are others set on stilts in the forest on the slope of the hill that rises up from the sea; the feeling there is almost European.

Nature Buff

Early the next morning, we ventured off into the forest with the most interesting man I have met in years – our nature guide, Dev Mahendra, a Singaporean who escaped to Langkawi 20 years ago. Since then, he has become Malaysia’s leading naturalist, and is largely responsible for Langkawi’s having maintained its phenomenal variety of flora and fauna, including one of the world’s largest populations of flying lemurs! He has published papers on nature and the environment through top universities, and hung out with Professor David Bellamy, the eminent English botanist, author, broadcaster and environmental campaigner.

I was expecting a pleasant wander around the jungle, but Dev made it so much more. As we walked, he introduced us to some of the plants along the way and demonstrated their properties: the sap of one of them was able to stop human bleeding almost immediately. He also talked about the importance of the



Clockwise from top: The Pantai for buffet meals, the hotel's natural jungle setting, and Dev leading a nature walk

indigenous plants and their vital role in protecting the coast and keeping down the population of unwanted insects – there were no cases of dengue in Langkawi last year.

Devi showed us two enormous trees, explaining that he calls them Heathrow and Gatwick because at dusk you can see the lemurs leaping between the two – a distance of about 80 metres! There were also monkeys, beautiful butterflies and an incredible diversity of birdlife, including some rather menacing-looking eagles. One species of monkey (black in colour) is born orange, so that it looks like fruit and is ignored by birds of prey. Nature is ingenious.

Indulgence

After a really good breakfast, a lie by the pool and a lovely walk back along the coast, I made my way up the fairly steep stairs to the spa. It's in a lovely setting, and its large, secluded swimming-pool has both hot and cold sections. Unusually, there was also a



The cable-car takes you high up to a mountain lookout and suspension bridge. Both the ride and the bridge are extraordinary experiences - not to be missed!

steam room – one of my favourite spa facilities. The massage was really good, so I booked in for a mani-pedi and a facial the next day.

Out and About

The outing to the nearby cable-car was breathtaking. I had never realised it even existed, and was amazed by its height and by what was at the other end of it: an incredible suspension bridge strung between two mountains, and another

walkway to a lookout point with fantastic views.

We also did a bit of shopping. Langkawi Town is a duty-free hub and has a scattering of gift shops with some good bargains, but is otherwise relatively nondescript. The Oriental Village, a newer tourist destination at the base of the cable-car station, has some interesting clothing shops.

There is much more to do on this island of incredible beauty and varied terrain, but my spa treatments made me run out of time. I would have liked to go horse-riding, and to do the night nature walk – however, as the island is only an hour away, I can always go back!



The Berjaya Langkawi Resort & Spa

Tel: (604) 959 1888

Email: resvn@b-langkawi.com.my

Dev Mahendra at Dev's Adventure

Tel: (60) 019 494 9193

Best Times to Go: April - October

Flying-time: 1hr 15mins