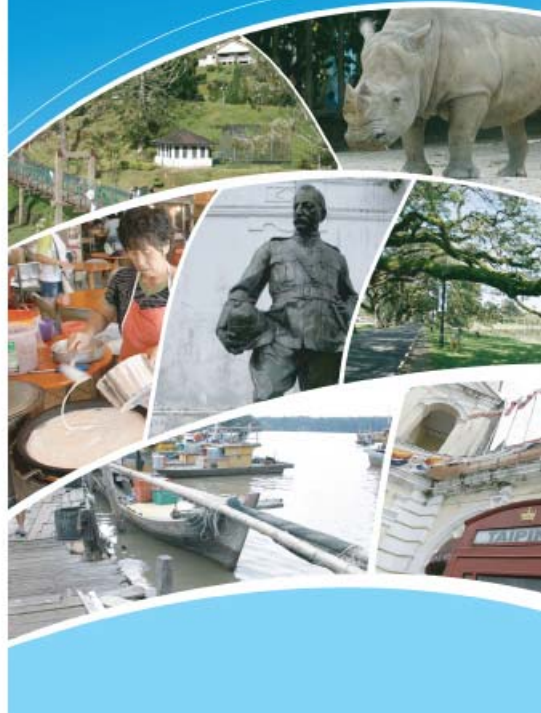


*Tai ping  
Charming Beauty,  
Steeped In History*



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## Charming Beauty, Steeped In History

*Taiping is not just a lovely town with picturesque attractions, it is also a historically important centre in Malaysia*

Famed for its attractive charms and historical importance, Taiping is an enchanting bustling town that offers visitors many experiences and memorable moments.

Interestingly, Taiping in Chinese means everlasting peace. Once a thriving mining town after the discovery of huge tin deposits in the area, it was the capital of Perak from 1875 until 1937. Although no longer a state capital and the mining of tin has ceased, Taiping is still a thriving town with many attractions that make it one of the most popular weekend destinations in the northern region of the peninsula.

Perhaps other visitors may feel the same way like we did when we arrived here, as the old streets of Taiping made us feel like we have been transported back in time. Old Chinese and Colonial architectures are to be seen every, perfect for those with the passion for good old things that spell of history and heritage.

The Taiping Lake Gardens is perhaps one of Taiping's most striking and stunning attractions, created from mining wasteland.

The country's first temperate getaway in the hills, known today as Bukit Larut, is also in Taiping, so is the country's first zoo. Other pioneering landmarks and attractions here include the country's first swimming pool called Burmese Pool, Kota Ngah Ibrahim Historical Complex, the Perak Museum, the Taiping Prison, its War Memorial, and the town's Clock Tower. It may be a point of interest for many to note that Taiping is also the wettest town in the country with an annual 400cm of rain, thanks to the scenic wall of mountain that forms its eastern backdrop, which attracts the accumulation of south westerly rainclouds from the nearby Straits of Melaka.



## Taiping's Lovely Lake Gardens

Strikingly beautiful, Taiping's most popular attraction must surely be its Lake Gardens, which is reputed to be among the most picturesque parks in this part of the world.

Boasting almost one square km of lovely landscaped gardens and green turf interlaced with several bodies of freshwater lakes, the park is ringed by a road that makes it a favourite spot for evening drives.

Interestingly, this beautiful spot which is also the oldest recreational park in Malaysia, was once an abandoned mining land but what you see now will provide little clue to the past as rolling turf fields with lovely bamboo groves, drooping raintrees, blazing flame of the forest, glorious jacarandas, and multi-hue canna lily clumps make this an extremely soothing place to be especially for those who hail from urban areas. The Taiping Zoo also lies within the park's confines, doubling the park's attractive appeal.



Placid and serene lake in the park



Ancient raintrees arch their branches over the ring road

One of the most interesting and inspiring features of the park is its huge raintrees that droop their branches over certain stretches of the ring road, resembling umbrellas with branches reaching down towards the lake waters across the road. More than a century old, the trees with their moss covered branches and mighty buttresses also host a myriad of ferns and climbers.

Nowhere else in the country do raintrees look more appealing, thus they are popular among amateur photographers. It is usual to see newly weds, posing in this part of the gardens with the raintrees providing the backdrop while they capture their cherished moments.

As in popular parks in other cities around the world, the Taiping Lake Gardens is a favourite spot for fitness fanatics who can be seen walking or jogging along special tracks in the wee hours of sunrise and just before dusk. It's a favourite picnic spot as well, and on weekends, drove of visitors from other parts of Perak, Penang, and Kedah, arrive here through their own transport or by chartered buses, lending a carnival like atmosphere to the area.



People who come here enjoy the marvellous scenery, or feeding free roaming macaques and Silver Leaf monkeys. Some even come here to do bird watching or just watch the day clouds roll in from the Straits of Melaka, and gather by the slopes of

the nearby and imposing Bukit Larut. Soon, the sky opens as they do in most of the evenings here and rain pours over the park and across at Taiping town.

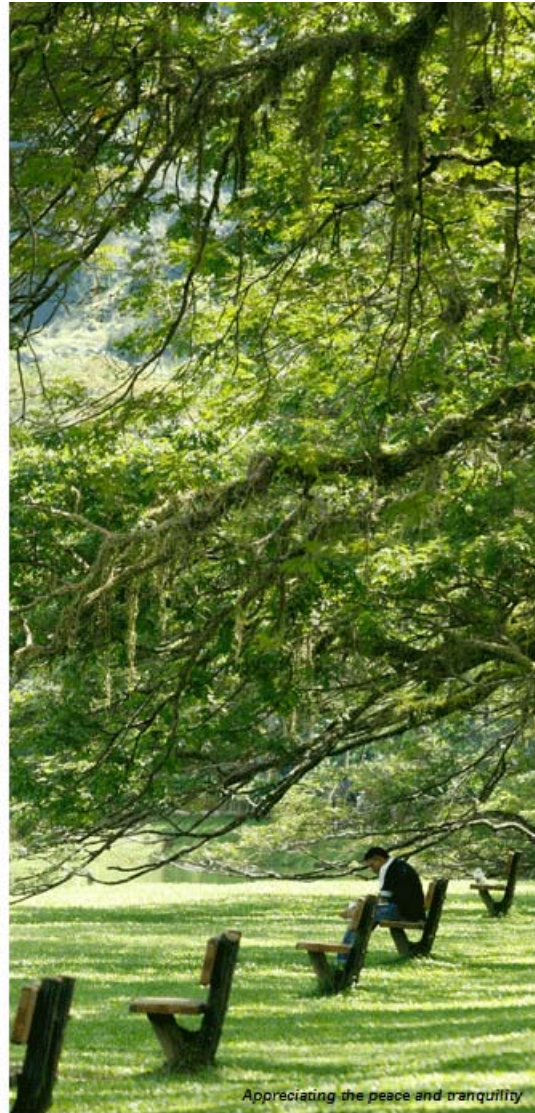
When the rain abates, the park gets busy with life again as the air takes on a refreshed scent and people once again through the area.



Motorcyclist, car drivers, cyclist, joggers, and strollers roam about the place again, enjoying the breath of fresh air even late into the night.

Some choose to stay at several hotels and resorts located on the park's fringes. Many others enjoy dining at popular Malay restaurants and at a favourite Chinese hawker's food centre located at the other end of the park that leads to Taiping town.

Whatever you choose to do here, the Taiping Lake Gardens is a dream spot, no one should miss.



## Taiping's Unique Zoo

Located within the serenity of Taiping Lake Gardens, Taiping Zoo is a popular attraction, offering visitors the opportunity to view local and exotic wildlife in refreshing natural surroundings.

Established in 1961 by the Taiping Municipal Council to attract tourists, Taiping Zoo is one of the oldest zoological gardens in Malaysia. In 1995 it began implementing a master plan that placed more emphasis on conservation, research and educational programs. As such, visitors will definitely notice its more naturalistic feel and interestingly enough, it is also considered to be one of the finest managed zoos in Malaysia.

Also known as Taman Mergastua Sultan Idris Shah, Taiping Zoo covers approximately 14.4 hectares and is home to 180 species of animals. Spacious and natural looking enclosures showcase creatures from five continents including Tigers, Lions, Elephants, Hippopotamus, Giraffes, and Orang Utans.



Taiping Zoo's entrance

Taiping Zoo also became the first zoo in the country to successfully introduce the Night Safari and it runs successful captive breeding programs. Among them are its elephant-breeding program that has produced four healthy calves.

Visitors will be delighted to see the cute antics of Jalung, a female calve that is the latest addition to the zoo.

The ambiance of the zoo is also refreshingly natural with wild animals, happy in their enclaves that are surrounded by streams, lakes, and tropical jungle flora.





Feeding elephant at night

For a different experience, opt for its Night Safari, introduced in June 2003. Most wild animals are active in the night and you can get to see them feeding or playing, with the help of special lighting.

The zoo is open from 8.30am to 6pm daily and animal feeding time is usually from 10am to 12pm. For the Night Safari, visiting hours are from 8.00 to 11.00 p.m every night including public holidays and 8.00 to 12.00 am on Saturday nights and eve of public holidays.



A gibbon at the zoo



Binturong





## Park in the Clouds

Not far from the serene Lake Gardens at the foot of the heavily forested Bintang mountain range is the start to a thrillingly steep 13km mountain road with 72 hair raising hairpin bends that takes you to an altitude of 1,036m.

This is the quaint and picturesque Bukit Larut that offers visitors sweeping views of Taiping town below and the Straits of Melaka beyond. There are bungalows to rent here, a lovely public park, Hindu temples, jungle walks, and breathtaking sceneries.

Founded in 1884 by the British, Bukit Larut is Malaysia's oldest hill station and the one with the highest rainfall. The mountain remains cloud free only for several hours daily.



View from the resort

Visitors will notice Bukit Larut's charm is its simplicity as it retains much of its original atmosphere as a colonial hill station. The hill station is dotted with many rustic colonial styled bungalows with colourful and carefully tended gardens. Several bungalows are available for rent, with rates starting from RM120 a night. Visitors can inquire or make bookings at the entrance of the hill station located near its foothill.



Park high above Taiping

You can't drive to the top of the hill resort as the road is too narrow. Instead, there is a Land Rover service managed by the Taiping Town Council. Aside from a tiring climb, the only way reaching the top of the hill is by these four-wheel vehicles. Hourly service from the foot of the hill starts from 7am until 6pm.



A bungalow at Bukit Larut

On reaching the resort proper, you will be greeted with a spectacular view of Taiping and the sweeping coast beyond. On very clear days, one may also be able to see Penang Island. A watchtower and a suspended bridge near a bungalow named Maxwell Resthouse offers one of the most magnificent viewpoints.

The slopes and peaks of Bukit Larut is cloaked in brilliantly green and luxuriant evergreen rainforest with sub-montane flora above 1,000m of the 1,400m peaks. Flowers that colour the resort include roses, dahlias, daisies, pansies, petunias, lupines, and marigold. The cool climate also favours golden sunflowers, reputedly the largest variety in the country.

If it's your first ride on one of these Land Rovers, hold on tight as the drive can be quite exhilarating. Hearts may also start to race a bit as you watch the drivers change gear while skillfully negotiating the steep and twisting one-way road. Although the drive up the hill may seem like an endless procession of hairpins, it only takes about 30 minutes to reach the top.

Midway, the Land Rover makes a brief stop at the Garden Tea House to allow vehicles driving down to pass through. What was once part of a small tea-estate, the Tea Garden House is a reminder of how coffee and tea were grown on an experimental basis at the hill but was then discontinued due to transport and logistic difficulties. At this point, visitors can begin to get magnificent views of Taiping and its Lake Gardens.



An observation tower



*Tulips are grown here too.*

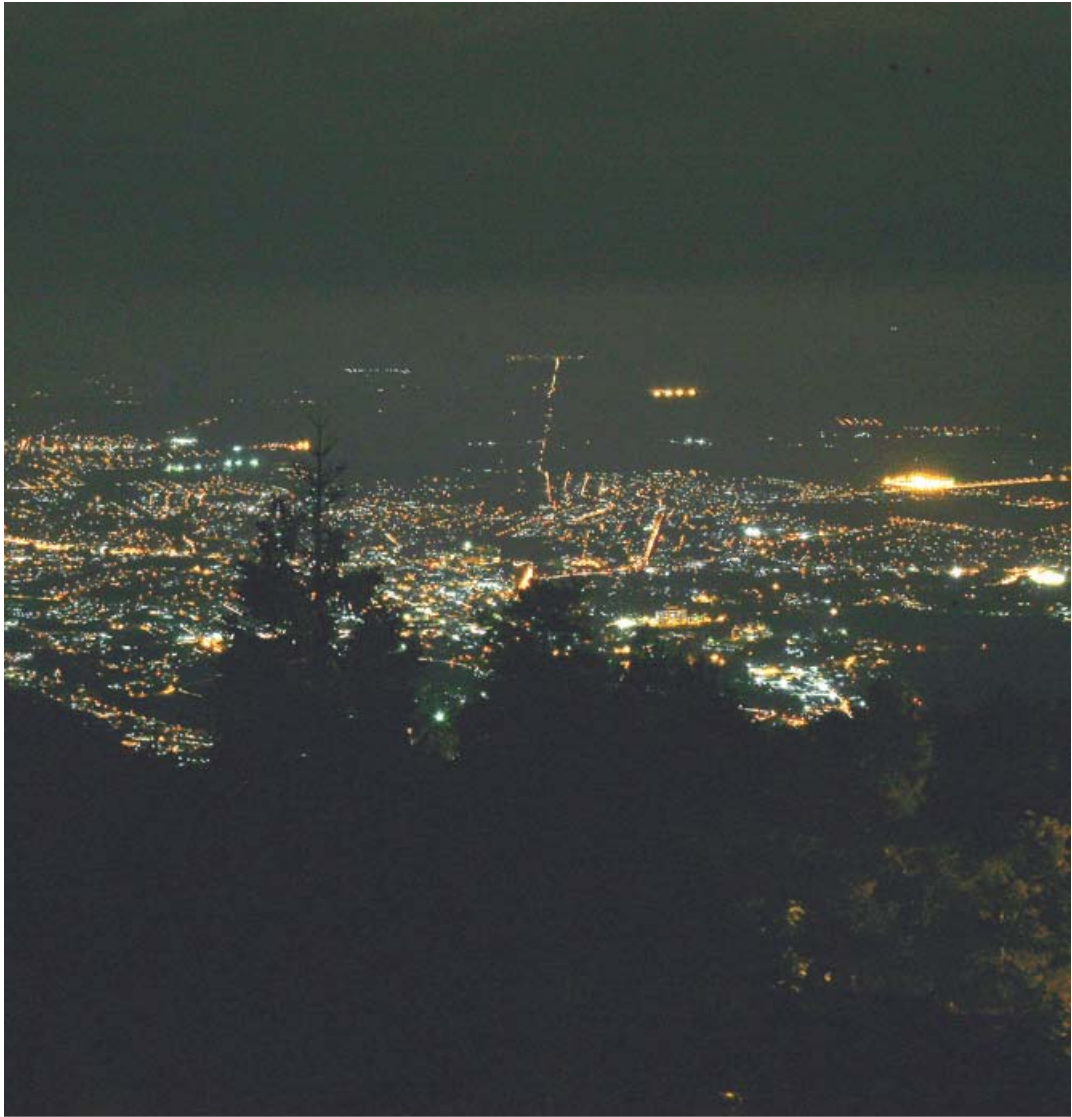
Bird life here is plentiful. The best trail for bird watchers is the Gunung Hijau Trail, which spirals up towards the summit of Gunung Hijau, one of the peaks of the Bintang range. The pristine mountain forest is also home to smaller fauna species such as gibbons, and squirrels, while its wild flora comprises species such as wild orchids, Mountain Giant Fishtail Palm and many species of bracken-like ferns.

Among the popular activities one can choose to do at Bukit Larut are walking and observing nature or partaking in the British habit of a long 'constitutional'. The first choice is highly recommended since the vegetation is interesting, changing at about 900m from lowland rainforest to lower montane rainforest. There are lots of huge trees, as this area is still pristine and exotic species include the rare Mountain Giant Fishtail Palm.

The wildlife is perhaps even more spectacular at Bukit Larut, patience and a little luck might reward a visitor with sightings of monkeys, deers, civets, or even clouded leopards. A rich and diverse weekend getaway, Bukit Larut is the perfect place for those seeking respite from the sultry lowland.



*A hill songbird*



## Taiping's Old Clock Tower



An old phone booth

In the heart of Taiping is an old clock tower that was built in the year 1881, out of wood but the structure was rebuilt using bricks nine years later. Taiping Clock Tower was originally the shape of a square fort but part if it was badly damaged during World War 2.

Between 1908 and 1950, the Taiping Clock Tower building was used as the town's police station and then as its fire brigade. It was later abandoned and was derelict for a while before being converted into the present Taiping Information Centre.

One interesting aspect of the clock tower is local folks tale revolving around its construction. It was said that the many conflicts during that period, especially the Larut Wars, were believed caused by a "dragon" residing under Taiping. After the conflicts, the people of Taiping finally located the creature head, and in order to subdue the dragon, the clock tower was built on top of the location.

Being a predominantly Chinese community back then, the tin miners of Taiping brought along with them from mainland China, the ancient Chinese practice of placement and arrangement of space to achieve harmony with the environment known as Feng Shui. This perhaps could at least explain the folk's tale.

But whichever the case it may be, whether its the vestige of colonial British legacy or Feng Shui peace offering, the Old Clock Tower is an interesting and pleasant fixture of Taiping's architectural landscape.



The town's ancient clock tower

## A Visit to the Past

Not far from the centre of the town, perhaps a km from the clock tower, is another important landmark in Taiping. It's the oldest museum in Peninsular Malaysia located opposite the equally historic Taiping Prison.

Perak Museum is perhaps the best place for those who wish to learn more on the history of Perak. Built in 1883 and opened to the public in 1886, the museum was the brainchild of Leonard Wray Junior; botanist, geologist, chief officer for Larut Garden, and the museum's first curator. Under the appointment of Sir Hugh Low, the third British Resident of Perak, Leonard started the museum with four galleries, a library and an administrative section, which had a curator, a taxidermist, a clerk and a caretaker. It was in these four galleries that Leonard displayed zoological, archaeological, ethnological, and herbarium materials, much of it recorded and collected by himself.

Statue of Sir Hugh Low



Less known but equally significant, the museum's library is also the first library in Malaysia. From its inception, the museum library has provided researchers with invaluable reference books, periodicals, government gazettes, and other materials on history, anthropology, archaeology, culture, science, and nature. Much of these books were in English and the British officials in Perak donated most of it. Today, the library's collection is over 6,000 and a few of these books are considered quite rare and priceless.



At present, the Department of Museums and Antiquities has taken over the Perak Museum into its fold and it is also under the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. Much of the museum's earlier collection still remains on display. To date, the total accumulated collection is 8,474, consisting of 5,074 cultural collections, 523 nature collections, and 2,877 miscellaneous collections that include archaeological items.

At the museum, visitors will find interesting and rare exhibits such as stuffed animals, and skeletons that are well over 100 years old. The dominating sight as one enters the museum is the throne of the late Sultan of Perak.

Visiting hours are between 9am and 5pm, including holidays, except on the eve of Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Hari Raya Aidilada. Admission is free.



*Old pottery*



*Animal skeleton at museum*

## The Country's Oldest Prison

Taiping Prison is a large imposing structure and visitors approaching the town from Kamunting will have to pass by it. Built in 1879 and once known as Taiping Goal, Taiping Prison has the unique distinction of being the first prison in Malaysia.

It was built to quell unrest following the highly destructive series of wars known as the Larut Wars between secret Chinese communities who fought over tin.

Taiping Prison during the town's early years was a centre for many activities. It housed the Government Printing Office, a bakery, and a laundry. Today, it is the country's best example of the 19th century jail complex. Recently, it was proposed that the structure be converted into a prison museum.



Taiping Prison was also the first commercial bakery in Taiping where in 1882, loaves of bread were prepared at the prison to be sold to the public back then.

Until today, Taiping Prison remains operational as a penal institute operated by the Prisons Department of Malaysia.





## Other Things To Do

## Where To Stay



Unwind, saunter around and breathe in the view and all its 'resident' plants and animals. You may want to make a stop at the Taiping Zoo or Night Safari or marvel at the magnificent rain trees arching over the road.

There are also the Aquatic Recreation Centre, Old Jetty built in 1910, (Jalan) Peace Walk, Spritzer Fountain, and pavilion, playgrounds, Rotary Club Corner for a jog, *tai qi*, and other morning activities. Youngsters can be seen at the Sports Lite Centre near the Taiping Prison. It is open daily at 5pm and has two street soccer courts, café, and toilets.



Wherever your destination or whatever budget there's a range of good accommodation to choose from in Taiping town.

So whether you are looking for an international standard hotel or simple affordable ones, they are all here. Sometimes, recommendations from locals can be helpful too.

You can stay at the Seri Malaysia Hotel opposite the Taiping Prison or at a new resort near the War Memorial Cemetery.

Alternatively, round the corner from the Lake Garden are Furama Hotel and New Champagne. Of course, there are bigger hotels in town with better rooms and facilities.

A refreshing alternative is to stay on Bukit Larut, just a 30-minute drive ride up from the base jeep station. Or you may choose to stay at the relaxing Taiping Resort, set on a golf course by the foot of Bukit Jana hills.



## Gourmet Haven



Laksa



Cendol

If you wish to savour the local cuisines and indulge in what Taiping has to offer, then you ought to head for a big hawker centre with food stalls offering old local favourites as well as a fast-food economy rice buffet table, and it's just opposite the Old Jetty. The place is open from lunchtime till midnight. For decent seafood, you can head to nearby restaurants in town. For Malay delicacies, try the Malay food stalls at the foot of Bukit Larut and cafés at the zoo entrance and Aquatic Centre.

Walk along Jalan Kota, where you can find many Chinese, Indian, and Malay food outlets with an array of choice at very reasonable prices.



A 'kueh' shop selling a range of sweet favourites



Special Malaysian Pancake

## Rustic Kuala Sepetang

Once the busiest port in the region, Port Weld was the main exporting point for processed tin ore. Opened in 1877 for cargo ships, Port Weld is now known as Kuala Sepetang. Rustic looking, it has long ceased from its role as a major port and is now used mainly by local fishing boats.

In the past, Port Weld was an important port for import export activities between Taiping and Penang. Apart from Teluk Intan, Port Weld was also used as an exit point from the Kinta and Upper Perak districts. At that time, the items traded were opium, preserved vegetables, tobacco, and tin ore.

Port Weld's importance to Taiping's growth increased when a railroad was built. Works on the railroad started in the end of 1884 and its construction was managed by the Ceylon Pioneer Corps. On February, the railroad was officially opened and plied the Taiping and Port Weld route, transporting passengers and goods.



Processing seafood



Fish being sun-dried

Today, the Port Weld signboard in four languages is the only vestige of the railway. Next to the signboard where a coffeeshop now stands was a booth for passengers to purchase tickets. The railway itself, according to locals had long been dismantled to salvage its timber and steel tracks.

Today, the town of Kuala Sepetang is small, comprising mainly of a Chinese fishing community and life here moves at a considerably slower pace. Being a drop-off point for fishermen unloading their catch, Kuala Sepetang now has excellent eateries offering fresh seafood.



Old shop in Kuala Sepetang

## Kota Ngah Ibrahim Historical Complex



The entrance of Kota Ngah Ibrahim

Built in 1854 as a personal residence within a fortified compound, Kota Ngah Ibrahim is an imposing physical legacy of one of Perak's most prominent historical figures.

Located on two km stretch of land and about 8 km from the town of Taiping, Kota Ngah Ibrahim was the residence of Ngah Ibrahim, a rich Malay aristocrat who held the title *Orang Kaya Menteri Paduka Tuan* and was the son of Long Jaafar, the officer who was credited as the founder of Taiping and the person who discovered tin in Larut in the 1840s.

Ngah Ibrahim also established the first modern system of administration in Perak by forming and appointing a police force, a judge, a magistrate, a treasurer, and a clerk.

Ngah Ibrahim is perhaps better remembered in history as a resistance fighter. He along with his father-in-law Laksamana Mohamad Amin Alang and Sultan Abdullah, who ruled Hilir Perak, were among several people implicated in the assassination of the first British Resident in Perak James W.W. Birch in Pasir Salak on Nov 2, 1875.

In a twist of irony, his very own personal residence and fort was turned into a courthouse for the murder trial. While other statesmen found guilty such as Dato Maharaja Lela, Dato' Sagor, Sepuntum, and Pandak Indut were sentenced to death by hanging, Ngah Ibrahim, Mohammad Amin, and Sultan Abdullah and several other statements were banished to the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean in 1877. Although Sultan Abdullah was pardoned by the British after 16 years and allowed to return to Perak, Ngah Ibrahim and his father in law's appeals to return as well were rejected. Instead, they were sent to Sarawak and then Singapore where Ngah Ibrahim died on Feb 4, 1895 and Mohamad Amin in 1908. However, on 7 September 2006, Ngah Ibrahim's remains were exhumed and were brought back to Perak where he was given a full-scale ceremony and a national tribute before finally reburied near his house.



Cemetery- Kota Ngah Ibrahim



After Ngah Ibrahim's downfall, Kota Ngah Ibrahim witnessed itself being put under the English administration until converted into the Matang Malay Teaching College (1913-1922). During the Japanese occupation in 1941, the Japanese Imperial Army made the fort its headquarters and war strategic operations centre. After the Japanese surrendered in 1945, and World War II ended in 1946, it was transformed into a Malay School (1945-1984). The fort was converted into the Matang Historical Complex beginning in 1985 and was handed over to the Department of Museums and Antiquities. From 1987, this fort was taken over by the Perak Museum Department as a state historical site known as Kota Ngah Ibrahim Historical Complex.

As a historical complex, Kota Ngah Ibrahim features collections of all types of artefacts related to the chronology of events leading to the erection of the complex itself. Within the impressive structure, one will find permanent exhibitions that depicts the history of the building's construction and its usage beginning from Cek Long Jaffar's family, Ngah Ibrahim, period of English Rule, the Japanese Occupation, Matang Malay Teaching College, and the Malay School.



Among the exhibits on display here are old weapons and equipments. Visitors to the complex will be able to get a closer look at one of the few surviving chain-mail armour used by Bugis warriors. Having much in common with the Vikings of early medieval Europe, the Bugis were well

known warriors. They must have been a fearsome sight, decked in their heavy chain-mail armour and weapons.

Kota Ngah Ibrahim is located at Gantang Hill, Matang, not far from Taiping. The complex is open daily from 9 am until 5 pm and there is no entrance fee.



## Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve

One of the best places to get a close view of mangrove habitat is at the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve. Gazetted as a forest reserve in 1908, it is the single largest mangrove forest and mudflat ecosystem in Peninsular Malaysia. Internationally recognised as a sustainable managed mangrove swamp since the early 1900's. The forest reserve covers approximately 40,711 hectares along a 52km long and 13km wide stretch of the northern coast of Perak .

The reserve includes 34,769ha of productive forest and 5,942ha of unproductive forest. Some 95% of the mangroves are tidal swamp dominated by Rhizophoraceae, and in all makes up 40% of the peninsula's total mangrove area. About 80% of this area is sustainable-yield production forest, consisting mainly of the Bakau Minyak and Bakau Kurap species.



The Matang forest reserve is watered through daily flooding brought in by the tide. Major rivers that flow through the Matang forest include Sungai Gula, Sungai Kelumpang, Sungai Selinsing, Sungai Sangga Besar, Sungai Sepetang, Sungai Jaha, Sungai Terung and Sungai Jarum Mas. The estuaries within the forest reserve range in width from two to four km and the larger ones are Kuala Gula-Kuala Kelumpang, Kuala Selinsing-Kuala Sangga Besar, Kuala Larut-Kuala Jaha, and the Kuala Trong-Kuala Jarum Mas estuaries.



The Matang Mangrove Forest is an important site for coastal migratory water birds as well as a large portion of migratory forest birds. According to the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), as many as 43,000 to 85,000 birds have been estimated to use the forest during their migration. Furthermore, a study made by the Department of Wildlife

and National Parks in 1995 has identified up to 75 species of birds that frequent the Matang mangrove forest.

Thanks to the diversity of plant and animal species (including several species of migratory birds) within the mudflat ecosystem, Matang Mangrove is an invaluable source of research and education, especially for students of ecology, forestry, fishery, botany or zoology.

In a step by the state-government to further educate the public on the importance of the mudflat ecosystem and the sustainable yield basis of Matang Mangrove, a 300m stretch of walkway and a Nature Education Centre has been set up and managed by the Larut/Matang Forestry Department. Fast becoming an eco-tourism attraction, accommodation is available for visitors in the form of chalets in Taman Paya Laut complex belonging to Forestry Department.



A mature 'bakau'



Mangrove tree in the Matang reserve

## Where Charcoal is Made

Visiting the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve will not be complete without stopping by one of the many nearby charcoal kilns. Over 348 charcoal kilns operate in the Matang mangroves, making this place the country's largest producer of mangrove charcoal.

Making charcoal is time consuming and hard work. After the mangrove trees or *bakau minyak* are harvested from the forest reserve, they are cut into roughly 1.6m logs and the bark is stripped to reduce excess moisture. The logs, from the *Rhizophora Apiculata* or *Rhizophora Mucronata* trees are then transported to the kilns by boats and then packed and sealed in a 7m tall igloo-shaped kiln.



Transporting mangrove wood

The process of making charcoal is essentially the carbonisation of wood through the removal of moisture. In order to do this, the logs are left to bake inside the kiln for eight to 10 days at a temperature of 83°C, and then baked for another 12 to 14 days at 220°C. Finally, the logs are left to cool for another eight days before the kiln is unsealed. This whole process of gradually heating and then cooling takes about a month, depending on the moisture within the harvested logs. Each kiln, which usually can be used for eight years, is able to produce around 10 tonnes of charcoal from 40 tonnes of mangrove in a single burn.



Mangrove wood to be made into charcoal



Charcoal

Once a dying trade due to the popularity of conventional gas cooking, the charcoal trade resurged with a new demand arising from Japan. The kilns of Matang have now become a tourism attraction. Visitors on their way to or from the Kuala Sepetang Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve can be seen stopping for guided tours.





## Getting There



From the south, exit the North-South Highway at Changkat Jering toll gate. From the north, exit at the Kamunting toll gate.

Drive right through Taiping town using Jalan Kota or Jalan Taming Sari and head straight for the hills to get to the Lake Gardens and other surrounding attractions in town.





## **TOURISM PERAK**

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