



Batu Gajah The Tin Mining Centre

text Ricardo & Eva photo VicinityImages source Dr. Ho Tak Ming

Batu Gajah was once an important centre for tin-mining, attracting an influx of Chinese migrants. They exploited the rich alluvial deposits of tin; contributing to Kinta being the largest tin producer in the country. The tin mining industry has since gone into 'recession' with the collapse of tin prices in the 90s. Other countries have also been able to come up with more efficient methods of production.

Many of these former mines now lay idle. If one were to drive around the district today, some of the equipment can still be seen. They are a legacy of what once was. The only existing tin-mining dredge in the country, formerly owned by the Southern Malayan Mining Company is still standing, just a mere 15 minutes drive from Batu Gajah town near a little town called Tanjung Tualang (which incidentally has a few restaurants serving the best freshwater prawns in Malaysia!).

It is huge, weighing at 4,500 tonnes with the size of 86 metres by 25 metres! Its gears are gigantic and the buckets are a good size of 5 tonnes each! According to sources, the Pemas Chartered Management Sdn. Bhd. donated the dredge to the Perak State Government. It is a shame that it no longer works and that we have not taken the trouble to preserve this very poignant part of our history and legacy. It is still not too late to do so. The dredge can be the focal point in educating our young of our rich past in tin mining. A tin mining museum in the dredge itself, perhaps?

Batu Gajah

Introduction to Batu Gajah

Batu Gajah is located on the banks of Sungai Kinta, just a mere 45 minutes drive from Ipoh City. This humble town started out as one of the many small villages of Mukim Sungai Terap, developed under the leadership of its titular chief, the Sri Amar DiRaja since the early 19th century.

There are many myths on how the town got its name 'Batu Gajah' but whatever the origin of the name is truly; Batu Gajah definitely owed a lot to elephants during the development of its early mines.

The oldest part of Batu Gajah town was established along River Road, beside the Kinta River in the early 1870s. It was a rough-edged frontier town with opium and gambling dens, brothels and liquor shops to cater to the miners with money to burn. Till today these shop houses can be seen in parts of Batu Gajah town, though in a dilapidated condition.

There are a number of distinctive first-buildings-in-Perak still standing in Batu Gajah and they include the Land Office building, the High Court and the Survey Department. Batu Gajah has been and remains the centre of administration for Kinta since 1884.



Kellie's Castle

The legendary and very distinctive Kellie's Castle was built by a planter, a certain William Kellie Smith who came from Scotland from about 1904. He started off with coffee planting and later ventured into the rubber plantation which was the inclination of the plantation during that particular era. He also tried patchouli parfum making.

Located a mere 4 miles away from Batu Gajah town, this 'castle' is built on a piece of land measuring some 538 acres. It consists of a tower block of six storeys and a double storey main building. There is also a courtyard inside and a number of other smaller buildings. Due to insufficient funds the building of the castle was not completed and was left abandoned.

Batu Gajah has what is possibly the only 'castle' in the country.

Alma Bakers' House

Originally belonging to Charles Alma Baker, it was very much a living heritage. Located along Changkat Road it was located among extensive trees and gardens. Baker, who designed the original house by himself, brought in builders from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for the project. The mansion was also used for the filming of several scenes of the movie *Anna and the King* in 1999. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the house was sadly torn down in September 2004.

God's Little Acre

This cemetery is well-known throughout the Commonwealth. It was formerly the cemetery of the Anglican Church and was later dedicated in memory of the fallen during the Emergency in 1948-1960. God's Little Acre is the burial place of 115 European civilians, members of the British Royal Air Force, the British Armed Forces Corps of Royal Marines and other members of the Commonwealth security forces. A ceremony is held every year to commemorate them.



Batu Gajah Prison

Established in the late 1890s by the British, it is still used today. In the past, it has housed many famous prisoners including the Singaporean wartime hero, Colonel Lim Bo Sing and our own local heroine, Cybil Kathigasu, who were both captured and tortured there by the Japanese.



Kuan Tay Temple

The Kuan Tay Temple is dedicated to the Chinese God of War and was built in the 19th Century to cater to the spiritual needs of the Chinese community. It is now over a hundred years old. The Kuan Tay Temple is the venue for over twenty Chinese operas a year.



Sri Subramaniyar Temple

The Sri Subramaniyar Temple was founded by Malai Perumal Pillay (also the founder of the former English Government School). It is the oldest and biggest Hindu temple in Batu Gajah. It is now 90 years old and a popular venue for annual Hindu processions and ceremonies.



Wanon Theatre

Wanon Theatre in Batu Gajah town is now Restoran Masuri. It is popular among the locals for its notoriously good mee goreng and mee rebus.



Did you know?

Kuala Kangsar is our Royal town but Batu Gajah can also lay claim somewhat to that title. Do you know that our current Sultan, Sultan Azlan Shah was born and raised in Batu Gajah before he furthered his studies to the Malay College Kuala Kangsar? His mother, the late Yang Teramat Mulia Toh Puan Besar Perak Hajah Hatijah binti Dato' Dewangsa Ahmad is born and bred in Batu Gajah.

He still makes regular visits to Batu Gajah. The bungalow in Changkat where Sultan Azlan Shah grew up is now preserved for its heritage value. 📌

Batu Gajah



1. GOD'S LITTLE ACRE



2. HOSPITAL



3. ST. JOSEPH CHURCH



4. OLD COURT HOUSE



5. SRI SUBRAMANIYAR TEMPLE

ONE DAY HERITAGE TRAIL OF BATU GAJAH

SUGGESTED TRAVEL SCHEDULE

9.30am
Kellie's Castle
Sri Maha
Mariamman Temple

10.30am
Kuan Tay Temple

11.10am
Hospital
Old Court House
St. Joseph Church
God's Little Acre
Kinta Gaol

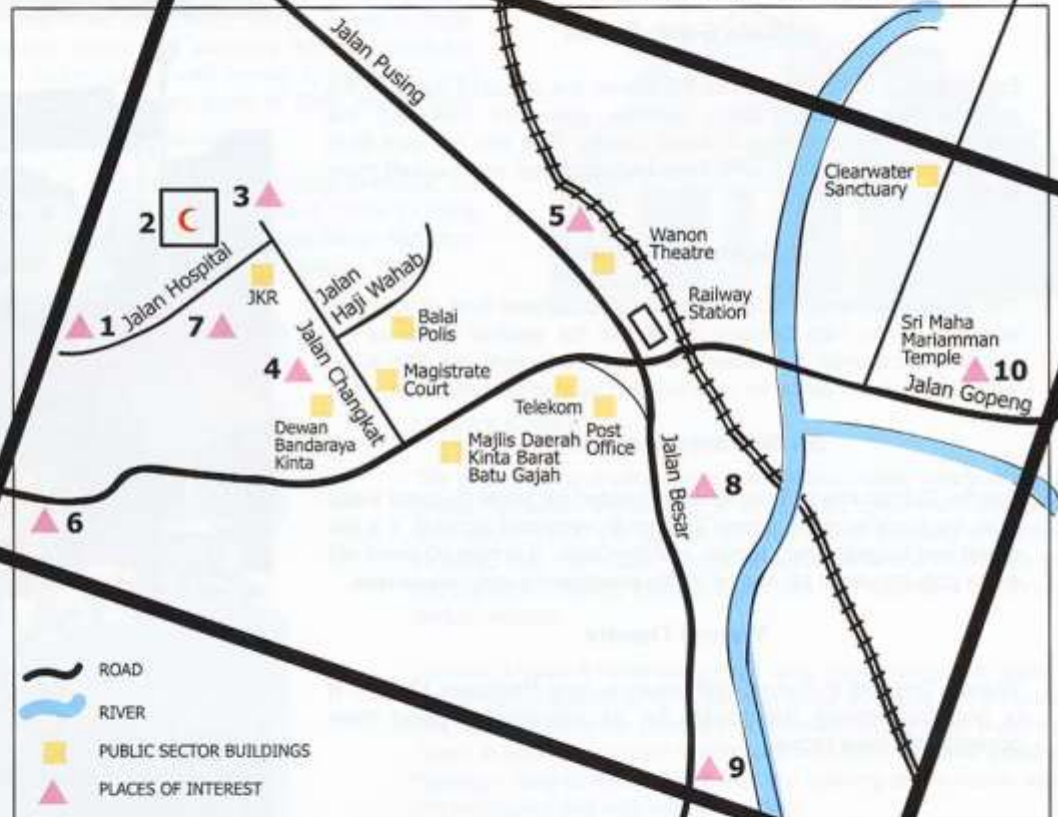
12.30pm
Mee rebus for lunch
at Wanon Theatre

1.30pm
Sri Subramaniyar
Temple

2.30pm
Tin Mining Dredge

4.00pm
Clearwater Sanctuary

5.00pm
Home, Sweet Home!



ROAD
RIVER
PUBLIC SECTOR BUILDINGS
PLACES OF INTEREST



6. ALMA BAKER'S SITE



7. KINTA GAOL



8. KUAN TAY TEMPLE



9. TIN MINING DREDGE

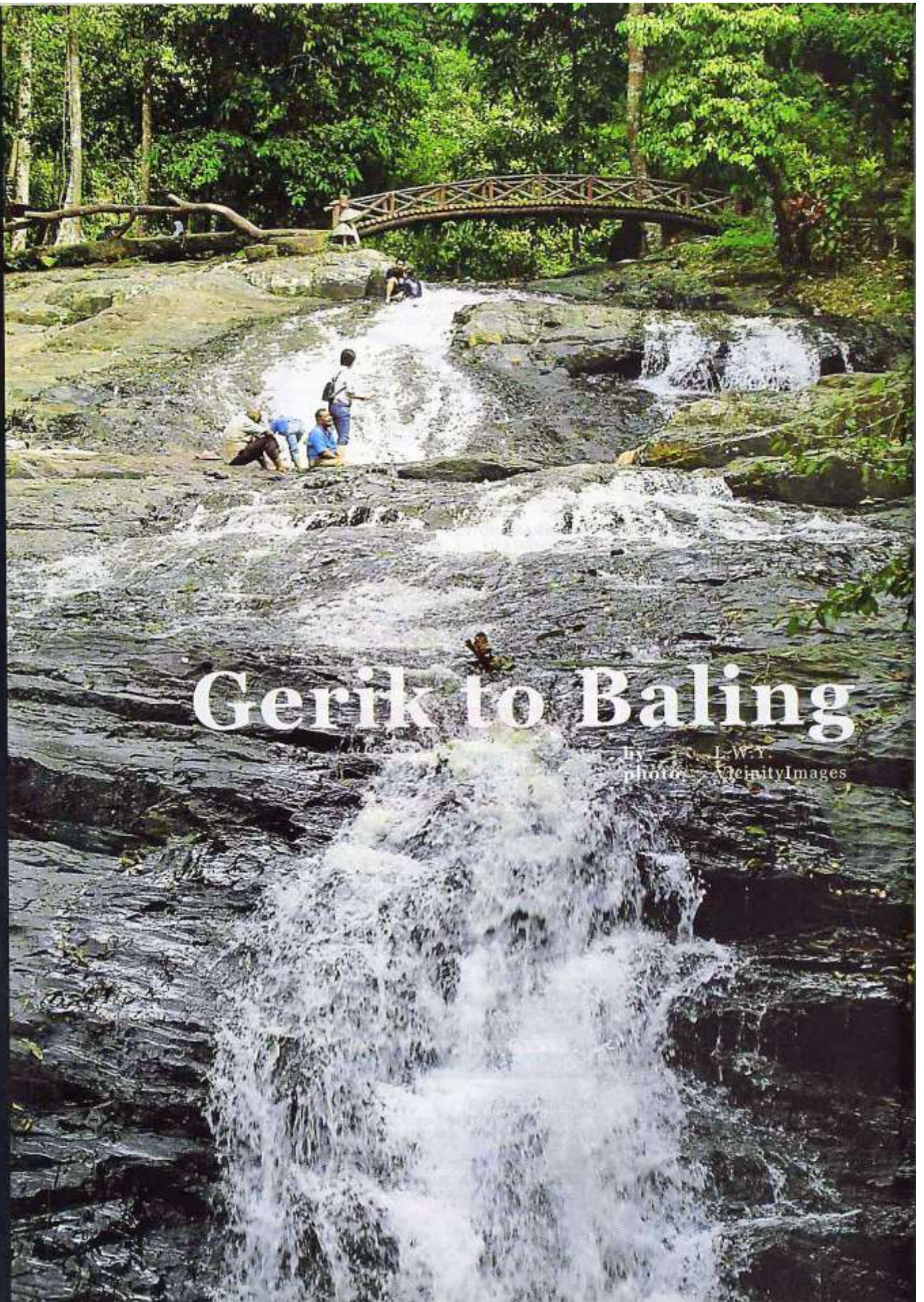


10. KELLIE'S CASTLE

Drive

Gerik to Baling

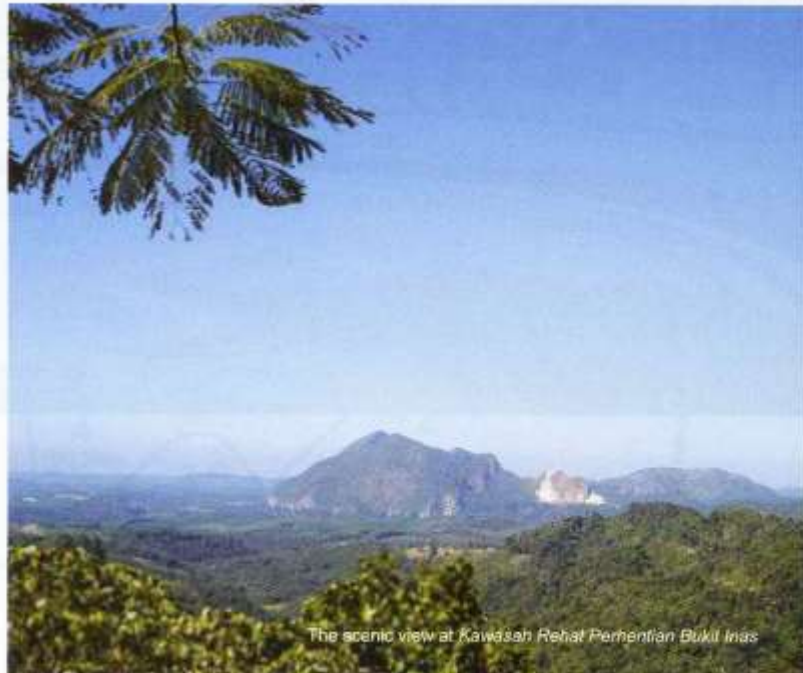
By photo L.W.Y. VicinityImages



Aright. So sitting at the office desk doesn't really grant you a sense of adventure. Still, I wasn't exactly in search for one either. Not until the boss came up to me, grinned, and told me that I was about to embark on a trip from Gerik to Baling. Oh! My first thought was "Baling? Where's that?" Then, it suddenly came to me. Baling - The sleepy town where Tunku Abdul Rahman met communist leaders like Chin Peng and Rashid Maidin for the 'Baling Talks'. My travelling partner was Ah Choy.

And so that was how it all began. The start of the journey from Gerik was a smooth one. Nothing went wrong. The morning had just begun and Gerik town looks as if it was still fast-asleep. The petrol tank was full and so were our stomachs. We had just had a nice hearty breakfast at the food court in Gerik. What could go wrong? 57km to Baling - The 'smooth' journey only lasted for less than 5 minutes before we met up with a road construction site. From the 70kmph, we had to go 40kmph or sometimes even less, trying to avoid the red and white hazard bars that seem to be scattered on the road.

Some ten minutes later, we finally managed to say good bye to the road works. Still, my hope for a fresher environment was shattered because the area remained dusty. We then passed by an area which looked like a logging area because what was left on the land were dying tree stumps. Argh! What an eyesore! Feeling quite disappointed, I decided to look up and was quite thankful to see the bright blue sky. At least, something looks nice.



The scenic view at Kawasan Rehat Perhentian Bukit Inas

Throughout the journey, we passed one signboard after another counting down the kilometric stance to our final destination. We also saw lots of signboards that cautioned us on "falling rocks". Signs of roadside erosions were quite noticeable throughout. The journey was bumpy because the roads were not exactly in very good condition. Even the lines that appeared on the roads were unclear. I was about to wonder why it was in such a bad situation when something answered my query. A big signboard says "Kawasan Kemalangan".

At Pengkalan Hulu, we decided to take a detour to Gua Gendang where the geological wonder within the renowned cave awaited us.

Still standing tall - The Independence memorial and clocktower. ▶

◀ We walked around the house where the "Baling Talks" took place. We could only peek in because the doors were locked. The tiny house was empty except for some old photos hanging on the walls. On the outside is a signboard which reads "Galeri Putra".





◀ **Air Panas Ulu Legong** - You need to pay a small fee to enter. Chalets are available if you want to spend the night there. Although the place looks more like a heated swimming pool than a hot spring, our hot dip under the hot sun was rather invigorating. What's missing is a hot plate of curry!

Once back on the road, it was some twenty minutes later before Kedah welcomed us with open arms. We stopped at the *Kawasan Rehat Perhentian Bukit Inas* on the right to recharge our batteries. This place offers spectacular views of the surroundings but there's a very important tip that you need to know. The further you look, the better the view gets. The nearer you look, the dirtier it gets! Before reaching Baling, the road became quite hilly and winding. During this part of the journey, you will be wise to drive on low gear and not coast on your brakes. Although it does slow down the vehicle, it will also make it less dangerous as the roads are quite slippery.

Our destination, Baling! We reached Baling at noon and what greeted us was an elaborately decorated roundabout. Palm trees made of neon lights were constructed in the middle, giving it a refreshing and colourful atmosphere. We then followed the signboards to *Sekolah Kebangsaan Tunku Putra* where the historic "Baling Talks" took place. The next stop was Ulu Legong, about 20km from town. We had a pleasant time swimming at the *Air Panas Ulu Legong*.

When evening came, it was time to head home. The trip was a success but it was marred by the ongoing development. If more conservation efforts were made, the drive from Gerik to Baling would have been a more pleasant one. Anyway, on the way back, thoughts of tomorrow's 9 to 5 working hours came rushing into my mind. The trip may have made me feel mentally refreshed but if only my aching back felt as good! ✓



▲ To get to Gua Gendang, we had to go through Kampung Selarong. We then turned left at the Y-junction and the road became very narrow. Just look at the picture and you'll know how narrow and secluded it is! Oh yes, we also saw a tiny sign along the way which read "Bomoh"!

This place is really a hidden treasure. If not for a Kem Motivasi & Rekreasi Gua Gendang, which showed some signs of development, I would have thought that we were transported magically to some ancient forest.



◀ Before reaching Ulu Legong, we stopped to talk to some natives living there. We had hoped to take a tour around their 'kampung' to see them in their native costumes but we were told that it comes with a fee and we had to make an appointment first! Oh well!

**GERIK TO BALING
ONE DAY TRIP SCHEDULE
(NOT INCLUSIVE OF SIGHTSEEING
AND WRONG TURNS)**

Gerik to Pengkalan Hulu **60 min**
 Pengkalan Hulu to Customs checkpoint **15 min**
 Pengkalan Hulu to Baling **30 min**
 Baling to Ulu Legong **30 min**
 Baling to Pulau **15 min**
 Pulau to Lata Bayu **30 min**
 Pulau to Bukit Hijau waterfall **30 min**



1 TAKONG LAKE
Peace and tranquility



2 CUSTOMS CHECKPOINT
One step into Thailand



3 BUKIT INAS
Relax, gaze out at scenery unchanged for millennia



BALING TOWN
Do a little convenience shopping before the next leg of the journey



5 GALERI PUTERA
The 1989 Baling Talks took place here in Sekolah Kebangsaan Tunku Putera



6 INDEPENDENCE MEMORIAL CLOCK TOWER
A tribute to our nation's independence



7 ULU LEGONG HOT SPRING
Unwind and enjoy the luxury of a bath in the hot spring



8 BUKIT HIJAU WATERFALL
Surrounded by nature in her gentle beauty


PERAK – Lenggong’s Oldest Resident

In 1987, a Malaysian excavation team went in search of a prehistoric site in Lenggong Valley. It was led by Universiti Sains Malaysia’s Professor Datuk Zuraina Abdul Majid and was organised in collaboration with the Department of Museum and Antiquities.

They found various prehistoric sites, left undisturbed for the last 74,000 years at Lawin, Bukit Jawa, Temelong and Kota Tampan in Lenggong Valley! The skeletal remains of what is believed to be the oldest inhabitant of Malaysia were excavated in the limestone caves of Gunung Runtuh. Dubbed the ‘Perak Man’, the remains are believed to be between 10,000 and 11,000 years old.

The Gunung Runtuh limestone caves lie 105 metres above sea level and are situated west of the Kepala Gajah Hills. It is believed that this area was inhabited by *Homo sapiens* from about 13,000 years ago during the Palaeolithic Age.

The Perak Man was found in a position suggesting a ritual funeral; with the body buried with legs folded in a foetus-like position and with his hands grasping what appears to be the remains of animal meat. Around him were found remains of various animals including iguanas, monkeys, deer, wild boars and turtles. Also found were stones thought to be part of the hunting paraphernalia used by the Palaeolithic Man.

Lenggong Valley proves to us that civilisation that goes back thousands of years exists in our country. It would not be surprising if future excavations unearth an even earlier existence of man in Malaysia. The discovery of the Perak Man received wide publicity in countries abroad and we should take an interest in these efforts to rediscover the rich history of Perak. You can view Perak Man at the Lenggong Archaeology Museum. Contact them at 05-7679698 for more details. 





Taiping Prison

text Ricardo & Eva

photo VicinityImages




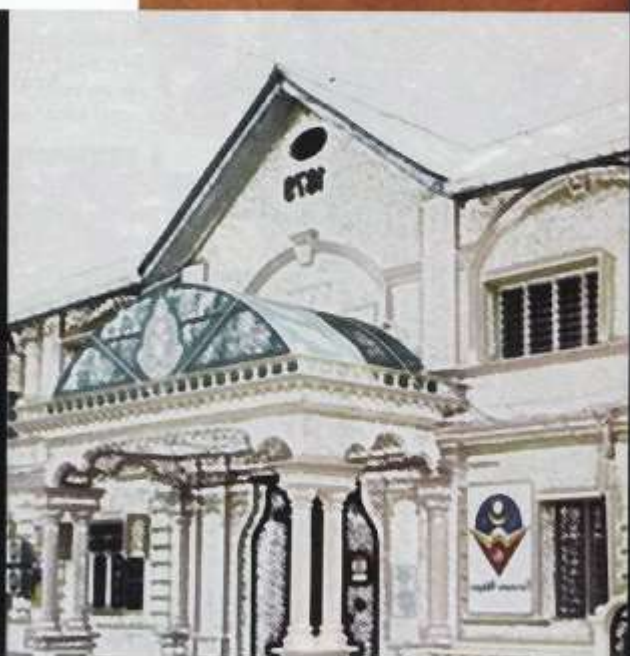
The history of Taiping parallels the development of the State of Perak as well as the country in general. It was built in 1879 and was then known as the Larut Prison. The third British Resident of the time, Sir Hugh Low had proposed the building of the prison to the British Government. Its primary purpose was to house prisoners who were involved in the fighting in the Larut War (1861-1864) between the Ghee Hin and Hai San clans in Perak. The unrest did not subside until much later with the signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20th January 1874. It also served to house other detainees who had been arrested for crimes against the Colonial government.

The original prison consisted of five blocks of buildings surrounded by a 9 feet high wooden fence constructed in part with bricks. The buildings included a hospital, an administrative block for prison management, and a few cells which were built to accommodate not more than fifty prisoners.

Later, Sir Frank Swettenham allocated a sum of 35,000 Straits Dollars in 1883 for the construction of a new prison with a higher stone cum brick wall. It had an inner courtyard with four bigger blocks and a number of workshops. Each block was designed to house up to 120 prisoners, equivalent to the capacity of Changi prison in Singapore.

This new prison was built on 5.159 hectares of land with an 18 foot high wall. From 1891, this prison was used to remand prisoners under the death sentence. All materials for the construction of the prison were brought in from England through the East India Company (EIC). "Behind the Walls Exhibition 1874 - 2005" is an attempt to record the history of Taiping Prison which is now 125 years old. It has in its time housed thousands of prisoners and has been the working place for many prison officers. According to the latest records, Taiping Prison now houses 2095 prisoners with the assistance of 753 prison staff.

Taiping Prison is well recognized as a heritage building and continues to function as an important detention facility in the country. 



Bird Watching in Perak

Malaysia is well-known throughout the world as a birder's paradise with our tropical weather and long daylight hours. We are a transit point for some of the migratory birds coming from their Northern Hemisphere homes to landing points further south for the winter. Birds come here from about August each year and leave around April. This means that we not only have endemic species but a whole host of Siberian and Central Asian birds to watch as well.

People travel from all over the world to watch our birds, so why don't we get ourselves a pair of binoculars and explore these delights for ourselves? Perak is famous as a birding paradise and has a wide variety of bird watching locations; from the hill-stations, to the jungles, and to mangrove forests and beaches along our very long coastline.

So where do we start? We will need a pair of binoculars, anything with magnification 7 – 10x is fine; and a simple birding book which you can pick up from the bookstore. You may invest in a more comprehensive volume like *A Field Guide to the Birds of Malaysia and Singapore* by Allen Jeyarajasingam & Alan Pearson, or on a smaller photographic volume with limited plates.

BIRD Watching in Perak

text Ricardo photo VicinityImages



Purple Heron
(*Ardea purpurea*)

Brahminy Kite
(*Haliastur indus*)

Black-crowned Night Heron
(*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Where are the birds?

Garden Birds

Let's start with our gardens. Your garden is home to many species of birds, some of which are among the most colourful in the world. Just wait out in the morning or the evening around the garden. Watch out for some of our very striking sunbirds, usually foraging in pairs on flowering plants at dawn; or look for the common Black-naped Oriole or the Magpie Robin hopping about on the ground. The Pied Fantail is another very delightful and lively bird. If you are observant, you may get a glimpse of our very noisy Greater Goldenback Woodpecker.

Jungle Birds

There are literally hundreds of species of birds to be found in our rainforests. One needs to be patient and do battle with all the insects around. Our oil palm estates especially have the most wonderful surprises. If the exotic is your cup of tea, then be warned that over 400 species of birds have been identified in Belum Valley alone in the northern part of the state.

Hill Stations

We have two very accessible hill-stations around Perak. Maxwell Hill is Malaysia's oldest hill resort and stands some 1,035m above sea level. Over 200 species of birds have been seen there and it is truly a bird watcher's paradise. Cameron Highlands is technically in Pahang, but who cares – Perakeans claim it for ourselves! Both routes up to the Highlands are rich with exotic birds and highland species are quite distinct from the lowland ones. As we climb, we get to see the gradual change in the variety and it is a most worthwhile experience. There are several good birding trails around Tanah Rata and Brinchang.

Old Mining Pools

Perak has the unique distinction of having hundreds of disused mining pools throughout the State. To migratory birds, the pools are an ideal stopping point for fish. Some of these areas around Batu Gajah and Tronoh have become major fish and duck rearing areas. Fish and duck equals flies and food! Every year hundreds of thousands of waders and shorebirds are found lining these pools and are truly a sight to behold.

Look out especially for the Malaysian Nature Society's birding sanctuary in Kampung Pisang near Batu Gajah, now under the care of *PERHILITAN* (National Parks and Wildlife Protection Department). Closer to Ipoh, the Burmese Pool is another secret few people have had the privilege of experiencing!

Coastline

Perak has a very long coastline. There are birds to be seen all along this coastline. The next time you visit Lumut or some of the fishing villages, bring along your binoculars and look out for the majestic White-bellied Sea-Eagle, the various shorebirds and even the gregarious hornbill (especially on Pangkor Island).

Mangrove Swamps

Mangrove swamps and mudflats have their own peculiar species of birds. The Larut-Matang-Selama district has the largest mangrove swamp forest in Peninsular Malaysia. The Kuala Gula Bird Sanctuary in this district is among the best managed bird sanctuaries in Asia. They have some 48 migratory species as well as about 120 resident varieties. The bird life there is nothing less than spectacular and a visit there is a revelation. You may want to take a boat ride out to the estuary as well and you can also opt to stay overnight in the accommodations at the Sanctuary.



Crested
Serpent
Eagle
(*Momias chela*)



Burmese Fish Owl
(*Ketupa ketupu*)



White-throated Kingfisher
(*Ialcyon smyrcensis*)

CONCLUSION

Ornithology is for everybody as it is a healthy past time for all in the family. If you are interested in it, get in touch with the Malaysian Nature Society or visit their website at members.fortunecity.com/mnsperak/focus/focus.html. ☑