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Skeleton, fireflies and prawn noodles - discovering Perak as an archaeological tourist



Lenggong is home to the Lenggong Valley, a Unesco world heritage site for archaeology. ST PHOTO: RAM ANAND



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LENGGONG, PERAK - Malaysia has begun efforts to promote archaeological tourism in its lesser known towns, where visitors are introduced to conservation or historical sites while sampling local culture.

I got a taste of this when I spent five days in three towns in the north of Perak - Lenggong, Taiping and Kuala Sepetang - in June.

Lenggong is home to the Lenggong Valley, a Unesco world heritage site for archaeology. Here, I traversed caves where human remains that are thousands of years old were found, and visited a gallery where a replica of the 11,000-year-old Perak Man skeleton - the most complete skeleton in

South-east Asia - is housed.

The area is scenic and serene, with a man-made lake and surrounding tropical forests of the Bintang and Titiwangsa mountain ranges.

A guided visit to Bukit Bunuh will reveal the location of a prehistoric meteorite crash site some 1.83 million years ago, resulting in suevite rock formations - sedimentary rocks that have chunks of minerals, rock and glass held together by melted material during a huge impact.

Stone tools found among these rocks potentially indicate the existence of prehistoric humans in this valley millions of years ago.

Lenggong has also preserved its agricultural way of life and its food. Lunch at eatery Dangau Mak Aini comprises traditional Malay dishes of fish and vegetables enjoyed while sitting crossed-leg in a farmer's hut, which mystifyingly stays cool despite the hot weather.

I recommend taking a cruise to explore Chenderoh Lake, where you might spot a gorgeous sunset with the backdrop of either of the two mountain ranges, dotted by village hamlets and relative silence.

I enjoyed a no-frills, yet comfortable stay at Rumah Tiang 16, hosted by Lenggong native Abdul Nasir Jalaludin in his private home. The community tourism champion's house is filled with collectables and stories of Lenggong's history.

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Within an hour's drive of Lenggong is Taiping, which is known as the country's wettest town, receiving double Peninsular Malaysia's average rainfall in a year.

Taiping is also home to historical attractions, such as the Perak Museum, Malaysia's first museum, the country's first railway track, and the oldest coffee mill, Antong Cafe.

Half an hour from Taiping, on Perak's west coast, lies Kuala Sepetang, formerly known as Port Weld.

Primarily a fishing village, it is home to a vast 40,000ha (about half the size of Singapore) mangrove forest that is a sustainable source of wood for an old charcoal factory.

The charcoal is exported to Japan where it is used to make cosmetic products.

I enjoyed a post-dusk boat ride to watch fireflies along the river, where I had earlier seen fishermen at work using traditional methods such as simple drag nets to scoop up shrimp along the river bed.



I caught sight of a flock of eagles picking up fish and shrimp from the river, against the backdrop of the fishing village.

Mee udang, a signature dish of Kuala Sepetang, was one of the highlight dishes of my trip.

Salleh Stall in the middle of the fishing village serves up the prawn noodles with a really rich broth. The dish brims with sea-caught prawns and fresh seafood from the river. Absolutely *sedap* (delicious).



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