

Hulu Langat, a green gem right outside the city

May 18, 2018

The majestic Hulu Langat forest reserve is a treasure trove of nature as its verdant green landscape offers a quick getaway from the bustling city life.

Once there, visitors will be amazed at how the area eludes development despite its proximity to the city. Its miraculous escape from urbanising efforts has allowed nature to prosper, and the balance between its waterways and roads is a testament to the fact.

For adventurers, Hulu Langat's subdistrict Dusun Tua offers a myriad of options with various jungle treks and camping facilities along its lush landscape. In this environment the bicycle reigns supreme, as it is perfectly laid out for cyclists to take advantage of the numerous natural attractions in store.

The subdistrict offers a variety of options for cyclists, from beginners to serious riders with distinct routes to suite different needs. For seasoned riders looking for a challenge, the Hulu Langat - Genting Peras route is a popular staple. Those looking for a more sedate ride could take the road up to the Sungai Langat dam.

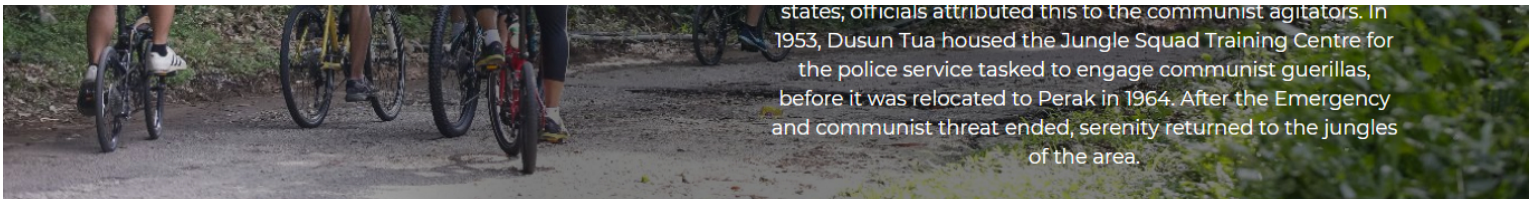
On this trip we took the road less travelled, cycling along Sungai Langat and Sungai Manggis then making a loop at Bukit Nuang with a detour to the Sungai Congkak recreation area.

Evergreen present, red past

Taking its name from the Sungai Langat River which also serves as water reservoir for the surrounding area, it is one of the smaller districts in Selangor state. While its surroundings have embraced development, Dusun Tua has been largely untouched, retaining its rustic kampung charm.

Dusun Tua is also famous for its durians, in addition to the beauty of its rainforest and the recreation opportunity it provides. Eco-tourism afforded by nature and agriculture remains a mainstay of the local economy, providing work for the locals that include an indigenous tribe.

The tranquil surroundings was once the stage for confrontation against communists during the Malayan Emergency. Hulu Langat saw one of the earliest and largest strikes by plantation workers in 1937, due to a wage dispute. The strike inspired similar actions in other districts and



states; officials attributed this to the communist agitators. In 1953, Dusun Tua housed the Jungle Squad Training Centre for the police service tasked to engage communist guerillas, before it was relocated to Perak in 1964. After the Emergency and communist threat ended, serenity returned to the jungles of the area.

Ideally, the short drive to Hulu Langat from Kuala Lumpur should take just under an hour, as it is just over 33km from the city centre. However, we chose to undertake the trip on a working day, and took longer than expected.

To get there, head eastbound on the Federal Highway and take the Seremban/Cheras exit to the East - West Connecting Highway (E37). From there, make your way towards Cheras Sentral/Taman Len Sen to merge onto the Cheras - Kajang Highway and take the Taman Suntex exit 702, to get to the trunk road connecting to Hulu Langat.

The turn into Jalan Hulu Langat (B52) is marked by Batu 9 police station, from there it's another 14km on a single lane road to reach Dusun Tua.

The morning rush hour made us thank our lucky stars we are excused from reporting for duty at work that morning. The rising sun illuminated the faces of commuters stuck in a mile-long crawl on their way to the city, while we zipped past in the opposite direction with bicycles on the roof.

But karma is a cruel mistress; we were surprised with a traffic jam on Jalan Hulu Langat. Further ahead was a turnoff to Ampang, an alternative and regular route for the locals. With the slow traffic, it took us about 90 minutes to arrive.

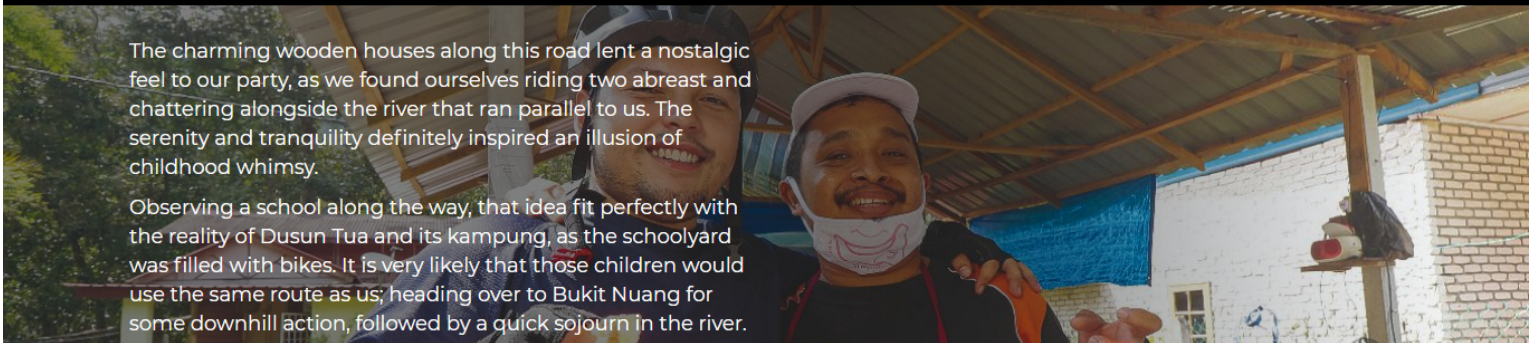
The route

After our early morning dash, a laidback atmosphere persisted for our ride and the rustic feel of Dusun Tua only helped. After taking our time to park and unload our rides beside the Batu 18 police station it was time for breakfast.

The first impression of the environs is a pleasant one with ample greenery on both sides and various buildings sparsely dotting the road. To the side of the road were the clear waters of Sungai Langat; it was a picturesque view of a Malaysian kampung worthy of the silver screen.

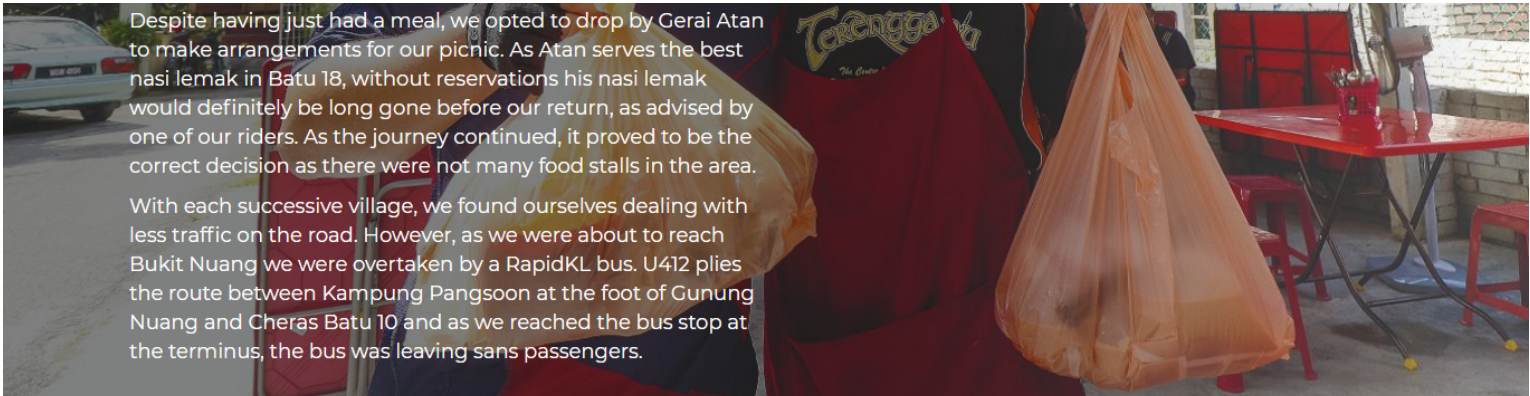
Breakfast was pulut, nasi lemak and roti canai at a wooden stall built on the riverbank, a stones throw away from where we parked. After a much needed breakfast and banter session, it was time to tend to our bikes. For this trip, the party of six was made up of equal part foldies and mountain bikes and by 10am we were off.

Regardless of the late start, the weather remained forgiving with a slight overcast, and coupled with the cool jungle breeze we took to the road on a leisurely pace. It was an unusual sensation; the lack of traffic in the area proved to be a pleasant surprise. The road ahead was relatively painless, undulating terrain over a few rolling hills with plenty of flats in between.



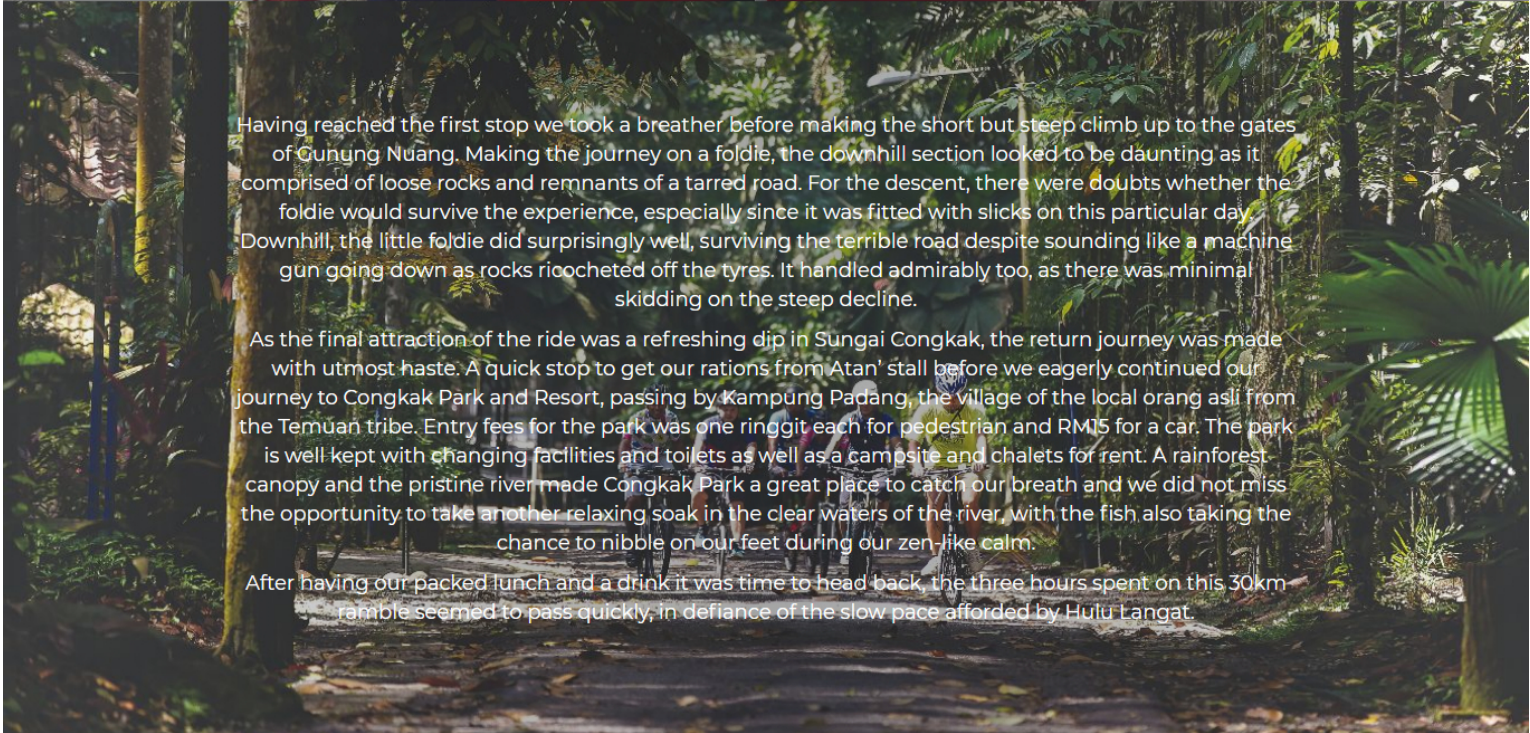
The charming wooden houses along this road lent a nostalgic feel to our party, as we found ourselves riding two abreast and chattering alongside the river that ran parallel to us. The serenity and tranquility definitely inspired an illusion of childhood whimsy.

Observing a school along the way, that idea fit perfectly with the reality of Dusun Tua and its kampung, as the schoolyard was filled with bikes. It is very likely that those children would use the same route as us; heading over to Bukit Nuang for some downhill action, followed by a quick sojourn in the river.



Despite having just had a meal, we opted to drop by Gerai Atan to make arrangements for our picnic. As Atan serves the best nasi lemak in Batu 18, without reservations his nasi lemak would definitely be long gone before our return, as advised by one of our riders. As the journey continued, it proved to be the correct decision as there were not many food stalls in the area.

With each successive village, we found ourselves dealing with less traffic on the road. However, as we were about to reach Bukit Nuang we were overtaken by a RapidKL bus. U412 plies the route between Kampung Pangsoo at the foot of Gunung Nuang and Cheras Batu 10 and as we reached the bus stop at the terminus, the bus was leaving sans passengers.



Having reached the first stop we took a breather before making the short but steep climb up to the gates of Gunung Nuang. Making the journey on a foldie, the downhill section looked to be daunting as it comprised of loose rocks and remnants of a tarred road. For the descent, there were doubts whether the foldie would survive the experience, especially since it was fitted with slicks on this particular day. Downhill, the little foldie did surprisingly well, surviving the terrible road despite sounding like a machine gun going down as rocks ricocheted off the tyres. It handled admirably too, as there was minimal skidding on the steep decline.

As the final attraction of the ride was a refreshing dip in Sungai Congkak, the return journey was made with utmost haste. A quick stop to get our rations from Atan's stall before we eagerly continued our journey to Congkak Park and Resort, passing by Kampung Padang, the village of the local orang asli from the Temuan tribe. Entry fees for the park was one ringgit each for pedestrian and RM15 for a car. The park is well kept with changing facilities and toilets as well as a campsite and chalets for rent. A rainforest canopy and the pristine river made Congkak Park a great place to catch our breath and we did not miss the opportunity to take another relaxing soak in the clear waters of the river, with the fish also taking the chance to nibble on our feet during our zen-like calm.

After having our packed lunch and a drink it was time to head back, the three hours spent on this 30km ramble seemed to pass quickly, in defiance of the slow pace afforded by Hulu Langat.

Guerrilla accounts

During the time of Malayan Emergency, the sleepy Hulu Langat we know today, was a bustling hub for communist activities. Beginning with the plantation workers strike in the late 1930's brought on by communist sympathisers, the area was a hotbed for more action over the years. In particular was the operations of communist guerilla leader Liew Kim Bok, also known as the 'Bearded Wonder' for his luxurious beard and his Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA).

An account of the confrontation with the communist threat has been written by Arthur Campbell, an officer attached to Britain's Suffolk Regiment tasked with dealing the guerillas.

During the Malayan Emergency, the solution to the communist problem has been approached from many different angles. One of legacy of that bygone era was the Briggs' plan, which relocated the rural population of 'squatters' into a forced resettlement programme aiming to cut off support for the guerilla army based in the jungle.



These measures are also supported by actions of the military to eliminate the communist threat in a more direct manner.

Campbell's memoir *Jungle Green* details the measures taken to bring down the communist terrorist Liew.

Much of the action detailed in the book takes place in the jungles of Selangor, particularly in Hulu Langat, where Liew Kon Kim an alias for the Bearded Wonder made his base. With the support of the populace he set out to neighbouring Ampang and Genting Sempah, to lay an ambush on the roads in the area.

The threat of Liew ended in 1952 when the Suffolk Regiment emerged victorious against the MRLA in a battle that took place in Kuala Langat. The death of the Bearded Wonder marked the end of an 18 month search by the regiment.

However, the triumph was a result of luck and heroism by Raymond Hands who stumbled on Liew and his bodyguard during a routine patrol in the area. Despite that *Jungle Green* is a stellar account of what went on in Hulu Langat during the Emergency.

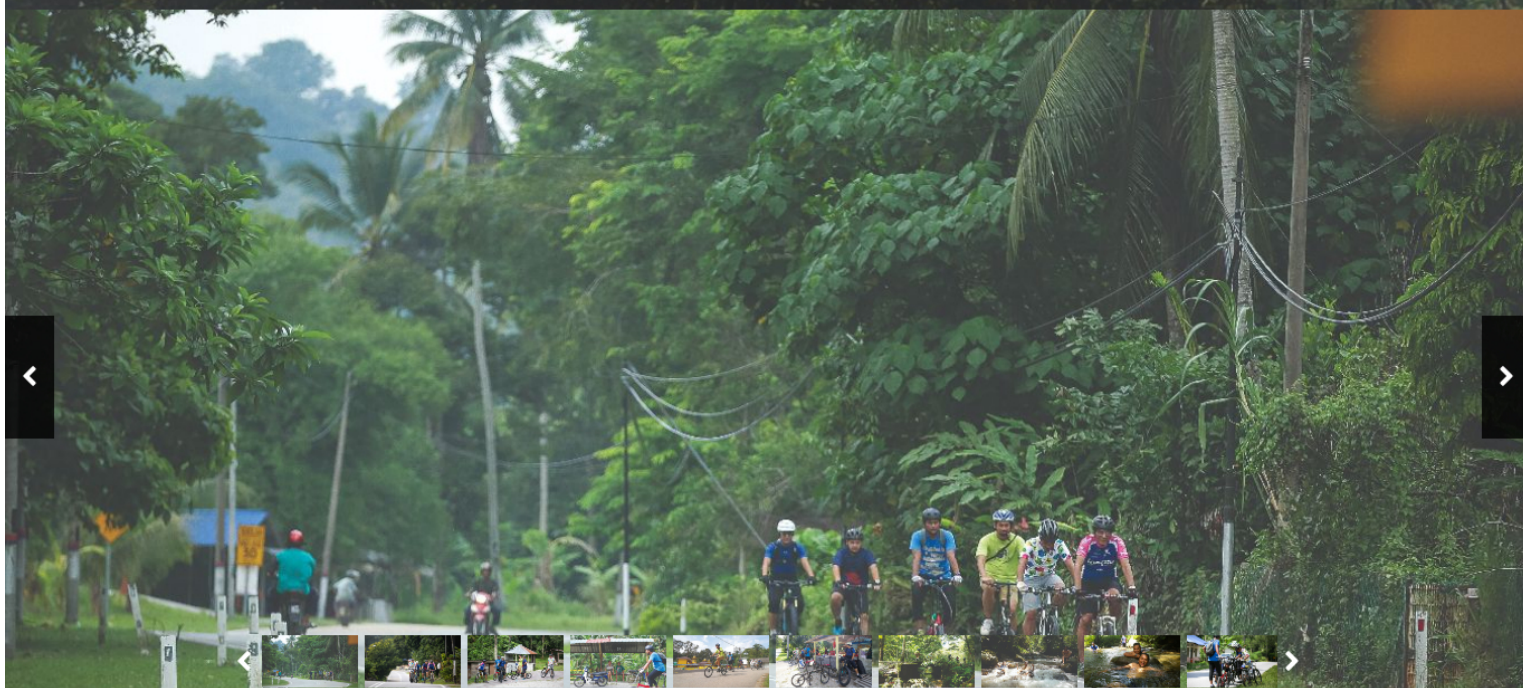


At an altitude of 1,483m Gunung Nuang is the tallest mountain in Selangor, but lies between Pahang and Selangor, as part of the Titiwangsa Mountain range. It attracts many thrill seekers, and is a favourite training ground for those looking to scale Mount Kinabalu or take on a marathon.

Gunung Nuang has three separate trails to the summit, one starting from Kg. Kemensah in Gombak, another from Bukit Tinggi in Bentong and a trail from Kampung Pangsoo. Of the three, the Kg. Pangsoo route is the hardest, according to local guide and caretaker popularly known as Along Nuang.

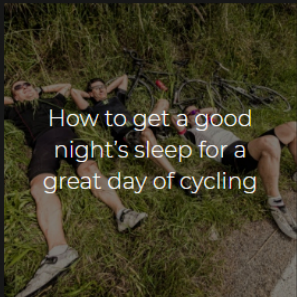
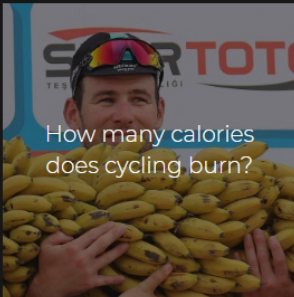
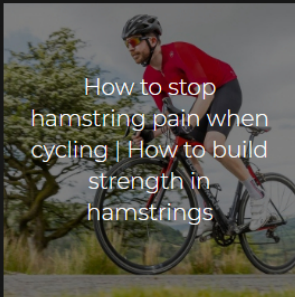
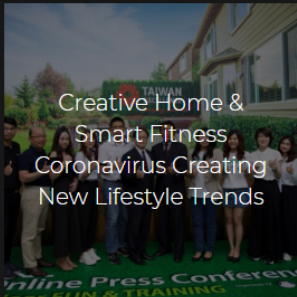
Along explained that the 10 km trek to the top is especially gruelling. He said: "For seasoned climbers the journey could be undertaken in about 3 hours." Along knows the mountain well, as it was his childhood playground, while he has taken on the role of caretaker and guide for about seven years.

In addition to the casual trek, Mount Nuang also hosts several endurance run events, in which participants circle the jungle trail a number of times. It is understandably off limits to two wheels.





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